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## Observing gender in the newsroom: insights from an ethnographic study

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### ABSTRACT

A large body of research has documented gender bias in the news coverage of women. Despite small gains in recent years, namely on television, and the growing percentage of females in the workforce, substantial underrepresentation of women in the news has remained. To explore journalists' social and professional world as a milieu of the lived professional and culturally grounded understandings of gender, we conducted participant observation of a television newsroom. Drawing on symbolic interactionism, our study explored daily interactions and communicative performances, focusing on how gender is built in everyday work encounters in ways that may be connected to potential changes in the practices of gender representations. The study identified three primary themes: newsroom environment, gender assumptions, and issues of language. Our findings support that gender is not given but performed mostly according to institutionalised common practices following gender expectations and presuppositions, making change more difficult and slower than necessary. Future research should complement the limitations of the cultural generalizability of our study. Recommendations include the study of gender construction in relation to other components of gender as a social institution and gender in television journalism practice.

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## Introduction: approaching gender in the newsroom

As media researchers widely acknowledge that the “who” in “who decides the news?” matters both in practical and in symbolical ways, a prominent feminist approach to the issue has focused on media-level explanations, including the role of newsrooms' gendered ideologies, and the coverage choices of media editors, the majority of whom continue to be men (Eran Shor, Arnout van de Rijt, Alex Miltsov, Vivek Kulkarni and Steven Skiena 2015). Because the under-representation of women in news organizations has persisted at leadership and governance levels, a key line of inquiry has focused on vertical segregation in the news industry, preventing women's access to decision-making positions (Carolyn Byerly 2011, 2013, 2019, Carolyn Byerly and Katherine A. McGraw 2020;

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Monika Djerf-Pierre and Maria Edström 2020; Kirsten Eddy, Meera Selva and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen 2022). This line of inquiry is in line with journalists own sense that career progression is more difficult for women than for men (Women in Journalism 2021). Furthermore, as Anne O'Brien (2014) has maintained, gendered work cultures may affect women's careers, as they may leave the profession due to gendered work cultures and structural obstacles.

Important research showing how newsrooms are deeply gendered—in its hierarchies, routines, and production practices, as well as in journalists' socialization into the newsrooms—comes from non-western countries too. Providing a useful review of the literature on the professional obstacles for women journalists across the world and focusing particularly on China, Haiyan Wang (2019) identifies institutional, organizational, cultural, and self-disciplinary obstacles to the career opportunities of women journalists. Looking into Korean newsrooms, Kyung-Hee. Kim (2006) documents the exclusionary mechanisms of women journalists on multiple levels—organizational (newsroom typically characterized by strong masculine bonds), extra-organizational (sources regard women journalists as less competent) and personal (tradition gender roles in private life).

Even though many other factors, including history, economy, politics and customs affect the status of women in international journalism in different countries and the fact that to a lesser or greater extent, patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes exist across all countries, behaviours and assumptions about gender have been central in defining the profession and generally place women at a disadvantage. This highlights the importance of social interaction which, in light of normative conceptions of men and women, show how gender is not only socially constructed, but also continually reconstructed. Thus, we need to direct more attention to ideas of femininity and masculinity and how they impact women's work and organizational experience. Researching how journalists perform their gender identities in and through our workspace allows us to think how these performances matter, both in a material sense and in terms of who and what is valued within the profession.

Understanding how women and men inhabit the newsroom is our work's general goal, which results from ethnographic research in a Portuguese television newsroom. This follows previous work on gender and news culture in the country (Anabela Santos, Carla Cerqueira, and Rosa Cabecinhas 2022; Paula Lobo, Maria João Silveirinha, Marisa Torres da Silva, Filipa Subtil 2017), suggesting the persistence of unequal gender relations. The GMMP Portugal report (2020) shows that most female television news reporters are indeed women (57%), even though the role of anchor remains male-dominated (70%). It also reveals the prevalence of gender inequalities in reporting practices, from content thematisation to news sources.

Local specificities of Portuguese culture, television status and gender aspects of journalism should also be noted. We recall Portugal's history of a long authoritarian political system (1926–1974) alongside the strong influence of the Catholic Church. Women's political and civil rights were restricted and repressed for half the twentieth century helping to explain the persistence of old customs and patriarchal cultural norms, despite today's progressive laws.

In the broadcast spectrum, the long-standing position of state television meant there were no competitors until the 90s. Still, currently, the medium is experiencing a fragmentation of its audiences. In terms of gender employment patterns, women's

presence in journalism was scarce during the first six decades of the twentieth century. The arrival of steady numbers of women in Portuguese newsrooms only began in the late 1960s, having increased particularly from the mid-1970s. This followed the trend of increasing women's participation in the labour market and the liberalisation of the media sector in the 1980s (Filipa Subtil and Maria Silveirinha 2021).

Our ethnographic approach uses a feminist theoretical lens and pays particular attention to how gender is performed in everyday social and professional encounters in the newsroom. The work by Monica Löfgren Nilsson (2010) and other studies on gender in various nations' newsrooms were enlightening (Sara De Vuyst and Karin Raeymaeckers 2019; Louise North 2009; Monika Djerf-Pierre 2007; Kim 2006; Wang 2019). We were also inspired by Linda Steiner who argued that journalism studies "require contextualised critical research on how men and women work, including how maleness and femaleness have figured in the newsroom" (Linda Steiner 2019, 461).

The paper is organised as follows: first, we briefly review studies of gender in interaction and of gender in organisational settings. Then, we discuss the methods used to collect and analyse our data, followed by a reflective account of the observer's role. The last section presents the descriptions and analysis of the findings. We conclude with a reflection on the research results and a brief discussion of the study's limitations and suggestions for future research.

## Gender in interaction

Margaret Andersen (2015) sets out three key positions on gender usefully highlighting the dynamic nature of gender and its relationships with structures, agency and culture: gender is seen as an institution or regime pattern, it is performed, and it acts as a social structure. For the analysis in this paper, we draw on gender as performed as it provides a micro-analytical framework that may help sustain the focus of other studies on structure, gender equality and organizational change. In an interactionist perspective, gender is produced and reinforced through daily interactions allowing us to observe practices that produce newsrooms as gendered institution, and how these are, in fact, constitutive of something called "gender." Because ethnomethodological accounts are concerned with how gender is achieved in everyday life, they give us a better understanding of how journalists ordinarily achieve a gender status.

We adopt a constructivist feminist approach to gender that conceives it not as the individual's property or as an unambiguous category but as a "situated doing" (West Candace, Don H. Zimmerman 1987; West Candace, Don H. Zimmerman 2009). Gender is something we perform or do, not something we are. Space precludes a detailed account of the concept of "doing gender," but in their heir landmark article, West and Zimmerman (1987) saw it as having affinities with Erving Goffman (1979) notion of "gender display" - a socially scripted performance of society's idealization of feminine and masculine natures. Thus, they start from Goffman's attention to how gender differences are accomplished in routine social interactions as scheduled performances that, like plays, constitute introductions to certain activities. Yet, they claim, because it is unavoidable, doing gender is more than scheduled performances, as humans are constantly "doing gender." "The relationship between sex category and gender is the relationship between being

a recognisable incumbent of a sex category (which itself takes some doing) and being accountable to current cultural conceptions of conduct becoming to—or compatible with the ‘essential natures’ of—a woman or a man. We conceptualised this as an ongoing situated process, a ‘doing’ rather than a ‘being’” (West and Zimmerman 2009, 113–114).

The value of West and Zimmerman’s concept of ‘doing gender’ lies on how its focus on the practice of gender within a constructed gendered order. In the words of Rebecca Wickes and Michael Emmison (2007, 326), “Gender is not a static attribute—it is a dynamic process that must be investigated as such. The challenge for research, therefore, is to contrast how gender is done with how gender is constructed to not only capture the fluidity of this construct, but to provide critical insight that might confront commonly held assumptions of gendered practices.”

Judith Butler’s work (1990; Judith. Butler 2004) and her poststructuralist notion of the performativity and materiality of gender allowed the analysis of the gendered practices that shows how stability and instability of how gender identity is “done” as well as “undone.” In this line of feminist criticism, gender is understood as a result of a continuous process of doings and repetitions: there is no being behind doing. Gender is a set of repeated acts within a regulatory frame which precedes the individual, meaning that subjectivity must be taken up through gender. Thus, for example, Joy Jenkins and Teri Finneman (2018) have proposed to expand Judith Butler’s (2004) theory of performativity to journalism to understand the potential of and limitations on women’s gender performances within the workplace.

Although both perspectives theorize gender as a social practice, as a “doing” within everyday life, studies inspired by Butler tend to focus on its situated and fluid character, whereas ethnomethodologically grounded studies tend to treat gender as and reproduced in any situation, allowing a focus on the persistence of inequalities (Francine M. Deutsch 2007; Julia Nentwich and Elisabeth Kelan 2014). Thus, although a dichotomous concept is problematic in many ways, it is nevertheless a useful category in approaching equal opportunities for men and women in journalism. In this view, journalism is understood “as a socio-culturally constructed institution with its own protean ideologies, practices and norms, resulting in the materialisation of the gender system” (Iiris Ruoho and Sinikka Torkkola 2018, 70).

## Gender in organisational interaction

Researchers working on organisations have also drawn on concepts of gender as a social practice, drawing attention to the significance of organisational culture and symbolism in shaping gender norms and identities (Dana Britton and Logan 2008; Patricia Martin 2003; Joan. Acker 1990), and revealing how organisations “do gender.” In the words of Silvia. Gherardi 1995, 130) “doing gender in an organisation (. . .) presupposes a set of already hierarchically normed interactions based on the sexual division of labour and of gender expectations.”

Judith. Lorber (1994) view of gender as a multidimensional phenomenon also offered us a good starting point to devise a framework for ethnomethodological research: gender is enacted by body language, posture, paralanguage and language systems. Lorber explores the concept of gender as a process of social construction, a system of social stratification, and an institution that structures every aspect of our

lives. We are mostly interested in understanding gender as a process through which everyday interactions build gender into institutions and organisations, reinforcing gender expectations for individuals. Observing how these processes are played out in a news organisation should help us understand the “behaviour of female and male journalists in media organisations as the result of practices and interaction in a culture in which gender is a major ‘given’” (Marjan de Bruin and Karen Ross 2004, viii).

The recognition of the importance of organisational context owes much to Acker (1990), who identified interaction and spatial closeness between the sexes as one of the arenas for doing gender within organisational structures through processes such as gender typing, gender symbolism, interaction, gender expectations and gendered professional identities.

Monica Löfgren Nilsson’s study (2010) of the gendering processes in a Swedish television newsroom followed Acker’s path in exploring gender typing and daily interactions. She discussed the thoughts and doings of the gendered news culture with her interviewees and inquired into how women and men journalists perceive the news culture as gendered, how they negotiate their professional identities and how gendered routines and rituals produce and reproduce gender. This work inspires our research that broadly follows the same theoretical inputs. We chose to observe all daily interactions and communicative performances, concentrating on Lorber’s first dimension of gender—gender as a process—without forgetting her other dimensions (Lorber, 1994).

Doing gender, in our analysis, is therefore focused on how masculinity and femininity are made relevant and created in a hierarchical way within the organizational context of a newsroom. In addition to this context, we also take into account that gender can be done in ways that are hard to perceive and recognise, namely by treating it or understanding it as non-existent. Indeed, doing gender is often done silently, or in invisible ways, implying that concepts such as “gender neutrality” should also be considered as ways of doing and undoing gender (Päivi Korvajärvi 2021). Furthermore, in adopting a micro-lens, we do not lose sight that institutional forms constrain ways of behaving and they have certain gendered consequences. In the words of Stacey Hannem (2021, 202–3), “By considering social structures and institutions as intersubjective accomplishments, we avoid reifying and overemphasising their determining role in human interactions. At the same time, a careful examination of human interaction, within its contextualised social world, must attend to the ways that asymmetrical status, power, and resources shape individuals’ actions and the resulting outcomes.”

## Methods and reflexivity issues

In devising ways to observe the newsroom, our first task was to decide on a methodological structure to search for patterns and meanings of gender at every level of gender articulation: in its explicit and implicit expressions and assumptions and its micro and macro contexts. Grounded in ethnographic fieldwork of participant observation (Kathleen DeWalt and Billie DeWalt 2011), we combined interactionist ideas with other strands of thought that sought to render gender visible in the interaction contexts.

Brennen (2013, 161) describes ethnography as a method that “emphasises listening, watching and interacting with people as they go about their lives.” The empirical material

discussed below is taken from an ethnographically inspired study conducted through qualitative methods: participant observation of a Portuguese television newsroom combined with in-depth interviewing of a purposive sample of journalists from different types of media, which included some of the observed subjects<sup>1</sup>.

In this paper, we report on a five-week participant observation of a television by one of the research team members who had a PhD in Communication Sciences. The remaining project team consisted of five researchers in the same field; two were former journalists.

The research aimed to understand how women and men inhabit the newsroom, making gender visible in an institution that tends to reject it in its production. Thus, we focused on how gender is built in everyday work encounters in ways that may be connected to potential changes in practices of gender representations. Our research questions were: Can gender performance dimensions be observed? How are these performances structured in terms of leadership? Do journalists engage in significant gender production/maintenance elements in their workplace? Considering the observed gender performances in terms of power, is a change of practices likely?

The methodological decision to observe a television newsroom was based on its reach and previous research (GMMP-Portugal 2020; Lobo and Cabecinhas 2010), indicating a substantial gender discrepancy in terms of news sources and representation in television news content.

Given its methodological significance, it is important to account for the observer's gendered experience in two particular aspects. First and foremost, as a woman researcher, hers was an embodied experience. Indeed, she knew she could not operate inside the newsroom from an idealised gender-neutral position that would make her invisible. Yet, this would not be a disadvantage because in interacting with newsroom professionals, she also experienced a gendered condition, thus becoming part of the "plot."

Indeed, she was there to observe precisely how journalists constructed gender, and most of them were aware that this was at least part of the reason for her being there. This possibly made her more of an "interested party" than an "objective observer," and she was sometimes teased into "revealing" her feminist beliefs. Also, since the newsroom professionals knew that gender was one of the observed dimensions, it was not surprising that this knowledge oriented some of the observees' interactions with her.

These two aspects combined led, to a certain point, to feel caught up in what has been called "The Feminist Ethnographer's Dilemma," rooted in the tensions that exist between two fundamental imperatives of feminism: "a political commitment to advance progressive social change through research and a methodological commitment to prioritise our subjects' voices and understandings" (Avishai, Gerber, and Randles 2012, 395). Here, the dilemma was that, as a researcher, she made visible her dual positioning as both a woman and a participant observer for a research project on gender in the newsroom. The answer to this dilemma was to take a phenomenological attitude.

Given the gender dimension of the studied phenomenon, the researcher was engaged in continually reflecting on interpretations of her experience as a woman newly arrived in the newsroom and the phenomenon of gender construction in the newsroom work environment and news content production. In embracing a phenomenological attitude, she also tried to keep critical self-awareness or reflexivity (Linda Finlay 2012). The ethnographic work necessarily included the reflexive awareness of her own position vis-à-vis the others with whom she engaged in the research.

The writing up and use of field diaries and own introspective accounts in the observation and analytic stages were key to this effort. The observant took notes of as many aspects of the newsroom's daily interactions as possible, paying particular attention to interactions that intersected with gender issues. She recorded differences in vocabulary, socialisation strategies, negotiation of hierarchical positions, reference to constraints on reconciling family and professional life, or sexist and homophobic jokes. These notes were gathered into various field diaries and later turned into digital files that were shared and discussed with the research team.

Phenomenology also provides us with a methodological orientation to explore the issues that our observations would highlight: the newsroom environment (the articulation of roles and responsibilities and the enacted performance and experience of the newsroom environment), gender assumptions (perspectives from which beliefs and differences between men and women were enacted), issues of language (the newsroom as a community of practice and language), and leadership and power hierarchies (performed professional hierarchies and underlying values).

## Findings and discussion

In this section, we concentrate on the analysis of the observed television newsroom. The data collected in research diaries was re-read following the methodological principles explained above. First, re-readings were accompanied by analytic interactionist notations. In a second stage, notes were complemented and crossed, whenever possible, with some of the subject's original words expressed in formal interviews (Lobo et al. 2017). The aim was to capture, reflect and understand the collected data in its totality and to concern the research questions. Three primary themes were then identified and clustered as emerging from the subjects' working lives: newsroom environment, gender assumptions, and issues of language.

### *Newsroom environment*

Goffman (1956) maintained that the best way to understand social interaction is to consider it an enactment in a theatrical performance. Thus, we look at how participants interacted in an environment that became a "stage" for the performance of gender.

As an organisational structure, the observed newsroom did not present itself immediately as having a rigid hierarchical structure. Decision-making was apparently a collective endeavour, and power was relatively dispersed. At the same time, roles and responsibilities were explicitly articulated, and people knew what to do, what they accounted for and to whom they reported. Most participants interacted in work situations, and some also socialised outside the office. Apart from relatively formal meetings, there was a very relaxed and informal atmosphere punctuated by friendly social talk.

As we re-read and analysed our research diaries, the enacted performance and experience of the newsroom environment became a key theme that an interactionist approach could best explore.

The physical environment was noisy, busy, stressful and sometimes playful. Journalists always talked loudly, and the activity levels would vary according to news programs' schedules and daily agendas.



Pedro, a news program coordinator, was the observer institutional host for two weeks. He spent some time explaining how the newsroom worked and answering her questions.

At a more structural level, other factors shaped the newsroom too. In informal conversations, journalists frequently mentioned stress factors such as budget cuts, human resources loss (and consequent professional practices intensification), “crazy” schedules, competitive pressure, and impossible deadlines. In formal interviews, many expressed difficulties meeting their daily professional goals. A woman journalist explained that “[before] one would have three hours to work on a news piece, now, one has to get it ready in half an hour to go directly to our news channel,” and another voiced her concerns about the way stories were increasingly superficially approached: “Obviously, as far as contents are concerned, we can’t work on information as we used to” (Irene).

Journalists often assigned positive attributes to their work environment, describing it as “friendly” and “informal.” Sometimes they would even link this “friendly informality” to stress management strategies. For Pedro, a senior male news editor, “if it weren’t for this informality, which is a way of protecting ourselves, this would be a madhouse, a crazy place.” Moreover, journalists explained moments of social tension within the newsroom as “natural” ways of dealing with stress. For the same male news editor, “some shouting in the newsroom is perfectly normal and perfectly acceptable.”

This was the stage on which gender was performed, and the gendered self was accomplished through the ritualised display. Here, we could observe how conventional ways of talking and behaving associated with gender were displayed (Goffman 1979). The newsroom could be very busy at times, and the gender dimension of this “chaos” could be seen in subtle but telling behaviours. For example, it became apparent that some participants would gather in small groups with consistent behaviour patterns during small breaks or calmer working periods. The first group that attracted our attention was a group of older male journalists who talked and laughed loudly and told jokes that could be heard across the newsroom. Other small groups of male journalists would leave the newsroom to have a snack nearby. Only one woman, Irene, took part in these snack and coffee largely male rituals. She was one of the oldest women in the newsroom, had an impressive career and was highly respected by her peers. Most of the other women journalists sat by their computers, eating alone.

This gendered division of a shared physical arena can be understood as a social situation in which ritualistic display becomes a resource for defining gender attitudes and alignments (Goffman 1979). Therefore, it confirms the first research questions as a significant element of gender production/maintenance in the workplace.

### ***Gender assumptions***

The next theme—gender assumptions—was visible in several moments of our observation from our first arrival at the newsroom and emerged from early field notes and diaries.

Before being granted access to the newsroom, one of our strategies in planning the observation was to avoid excessive stress on the gender lens behind our research, as we were concerned that this could alter and change behaviours. However, the gender dimension of our field observation was explicitly mentioned in every request made in messages or conversations, and most of our subjects were aware of our research lens.

As expected, the meeting that preceded the first day of the observed newsroom revealed some of the first assumptions made by journalists underlying their understandings of gender. While reading the research project's abstract, one of our interlocutors, Bruno, a highly positioned journalist—also a lecturer in journalism studies—soon began to elaborate on gender in journalism. He quickly noted that even though most of his journalism students were women, the best students were always men. His colleague Catarina, a news program coordinator and a fellow college lecturer, promptly agreed. She explained this by advocating that men have more “natural practical skills” and tend to be more expeditious and that these features make a difference in the practice of journalism. In contrast, she elaborated, young women are more committed to tasks but less energetic than men. At this point, Bruno added that young men tend to become attracted to journalism from earlier ages. In contrast, women only end up in journalism graduate programs because they have better general grades.

Despite these articulated assumptions, observed journalists were generally reluctant to accept gender as a topic worth discussing within journalism and sometimes rejected to talk about it. Their argument was that gender balance is no longer a valuable concern, as if talking about it meant to recognise differences do exist: “In terms of professional quality, I can't tell men from women, I don't make that distinction,” said Tomás, a male editor. In an attempt to bring up gender issues to the conversation, at some point, we mentioned how existing women sports journalists in the newsroom were statistically not very common. Aware of the research purposes, Pedro answered in a joking tone: “That is a very sexist comment! Don't you know that those differences are totally overcome?.” Albeit unknowingly, and despite the ambiguous tone, this could be interpreted as demonstrating how post-feminism can be a part of newsroom culture (Anna Williams 2010).

In contrast, during formal interviews, most respondents identified gender differences in journalism practices, although in a highly ambiguous and unconscious way (Lobo et al. 2017). Tomás, a highly positioned news editor in charge of journalists' schedules and tasks management, was a case point. Although he was initially very reluctant to talk about gender inequalities in journalism, he pointed out specific situations where gender would make a difference. In his words: “I have never had, until today, a single male journalist who conditioned his working schedule because he needed to pick up his children somewhere. Never! All women in this newsroom have done it already. They all have done it at some point.” How gender is invoked in this case shows us how the newsroom can sometimes look like a “bloke's club,” in the words of Louise North (2014).

Unsurprisingly, feminism was a concept even harder to approach, and in informal conversations, few accepted to talk about it. Nevertheless, some journalists cautiously referred to it in negative terms by considering it as “radical,” “useless,” and even “incompatible with journalism professions.” Irene, a female journalist, said: “It's the equivalent of working in a football club and being a journalist at the same time.” This shows the internalisation of masculine habitus, as seen in other studies (Martina Topić and Carmen Bruegmann 2021). Simultaneously, journalists would also often demonstrate views of women as a social group. This became apparent when Jorge commented (in a joking tone) on the presence of an Indian operator in the control room that day: “You see, this is how we work: we respect minorities. Yesterday we had a woman operator; today, we have a black operator.”

Gender assumptions, as discussed, confirm our first research questions they underpin how journalists' understandings of gender were central to the very production/maintenance of gender in their workplace, namely in ways that reinforce attempts to erase its significance in journalism practice.

### ***Issues of language***

Janet. Holmes (2006) reminds us that workplace interactions tend to be firmly embedded in "communities of practice," i.e., the business and social context of a particular workgroup, as well as in a broader socio-cultural or institutional order. The community of practice approach focuses on the practice of activities that indicate belonging to the group, considering attitudes, beliefs, values and social relations which underlie their practice. Nicknames and in-group language function as markers of membership in that particular community. The newsroom can be thought of as a community of practice, and language can be observed as a part of its functioning. Thus, we can describe "the discursive patterns which instantiate power and gender relations at work, and the specific ways in which both women and men draw on gendered discourse resources to enact a range of workplace roles in different communities of practice" (Holmes 2006, 20). In this view, we can observe the modes of addressing men and women journalists as discursive patterns enacting gendered roles in the newsroom as specific to this particular community of practice.

These modes of address in the observed newsroom included many diminutives. In informal contexts, diminutives are not an uncommon practice among Portuguese men and/or women. However, the observed gendered patterns in the workplace reveal power relations at work. In particular, how men tended to address women may indicate an affectionate yet patronising behaviour embodying power differentials.

Most men journalists addressed women colleagues by diminutives, or my love, dear, princess and even biscuit, unlike how they treated each other. Men journalists addressed other men colleagues by dude, man, guy, or by using friendly name-calls like fat guy or dork. This was a friendly way for men to approach each other, but it was also an only-men interaction.

The idea of "natural" differences between men and women has also been performed across the newsroom common language. Once, after a heated discussion on the phone with Marco, a well-known journalist covering a story abroad, Pedro unleashed: "The guy sulked. F\* it. Marco Costa is really acting like a woman!." In another instance, when Tomás was in the newsroom, looking very angry and about to explode while helping Catarina with some crisis, he suddenly said: "Please excuse me, but I just want to say one thing: f\* this!." In an environment where slang and swearing were a common (masculine) practice, it seemed that Tomás felt that the fact that the observer was a woman (and an outsider) almost prevented him from cursing.

These observed attitudes and language issues were significant elements of gender production in the newsroom, confirming our research questions on gender performance. (Table 1)

**Table 1.** Doing gender by forms of address.

<i>Men addressing women</i>	"honey," "my love," "dear," "biscuit," "gorgeous," "princess," "miss sympathy," strong use of diminutives (Angie, Annie, Susie)
<i>Men addressing men</i>	"dude," "man," "guy," "Darcy man," "fat boy," strong use of last names and friendly name-calling
<i>Women addressing women</i>	"honey," "princess," strong use of regular names (Angela, Anna, Susan)
<i>Women addressing men</i>	strong use of last names, moderate use of diminutives and occasional use of "love" or "honey"

### **Leadership and power hierarchies**

Our final research question concerned gender performance and the likelihood of change in professional practice. This connects to power issues, a connection observed through the last primary theme that emerged from our data.

During one of the observation periods, we were hosted by four different news editors and program coordinators of similar hierarchical levels: two men and two women. Pedro and Alfredo, the two male editors, seemed to look forward to showing the researcher their work and answering all her questions. Both looked enthusiastic about contributing to academic research on media and were keen to introduce us to everyone. Pedro made friendly jokes about gender issues in the researcher's presence and did not seem to feel threatened by the announced gender lens of the project. Laura and Catarina, the female editors, did not talk much about their work. Laura was quite circumspect and did not say much, and she spent less time with the observer than the others. Catarina talked a lot about various issues but not her job or newsroom procedures. Whenever we tried to talk about something related to her work, she would give short answers and change the subject.

On the other hand, she often winked at us, put her hand on our shoulders and gave directions on how to behave: "Don't interview anyone in the morning, they all have a lot going on" or "Here the environment is very different from the academy, you must greet everyone with two kisses [common Portuguese behaviour]. No handshaking here." Janet Holmes (2006) speaks of some women adopting a "motherly" role as a helpful strategy for resolving the inherent contradictions of taking a senior and powerful leadership role in a relatively feminine community of practice. Catarina's behaviour could be understood in this light.

Although these aspects will also certainly be part of personality traits, they nevertheless embody a gender dimension when individual differences are set against a background of diffuse yet gendered forms of power and social control of the newsroom.

This became clear when considering differences in the way these male and female journalists exercised leadership of their own working teams. Pedro and Alfredo had a more confident, frontal and apparently aggressive leadership style than their women colleagues. Both talked loudly, used a lot of slang and cursing, confronted people directly and demanded tasks. When there were conflicts, they managed them straightforwardly. As for women, we could observe Holmes' insight (2006) that effective women leaders are able to draw expertly on a repertoire of linguistic strategies coded both as "masculine" and "feminine." Indeed, Catarina and Laura had more discrete leadership. They would talk in a lower tone of voice and were never as direct as their male peers in their instructions

they gave. Catarina would always ask first about people's families, remind her interlocutors of some past common episode, say something sweet as "I miss you honey" and, after that, mention the phone call's purpose: "I need you to be at the Parliament at ten." In some ways, they acted like newsroom "mothers" who were in charge of orienting their "children" (Holmes 2006). Even though they were no less assertive than Pedro and Alfredo, their structural position as women editors also seemed to set the boundaries of the impressions they chose to enact.

For Baxter (2014; Judith Baxter 2010), the linguistic construction of leadership varies, but not in conventionally gendered ways. Her research showed that: "Enacting authority in order to get business done expertly can be achieved by a finely nuanced range of linguistic skills, and women leaders are often particularly effective at using these" (Baxter 2010, 16). Indeed, we found that the female editors used their apparently "intimate" modes of address as a tool to exercise power and control without producing any substantial change in the newsroom. In their own way, they used what Anne. O'Brien (2017) called a relational, feminine mode of leadership, which should not be confused with feminist leadership: "merely welcoming feminine traits of relational capacity into a paradigm of leadership that remains fundamentally masculinist, does not constitute a radically altered or feminist mode of leadership; it does not demand structural transformation" (838).

Regarding power decisions within the newsroom, we soon found that journalists did not like to talk about "bosses" or recognise a specific hierarchical power structure. Instead, they claimed that everything was everyone's responsibility and that everyone was entitled to contribute to decisions. This was confirmed during formal interviews (reference omitted for anonymity) when informants claimed they had the power to choose and edit stories at their own will, asserting autonomy as a cornerstone of their news production. However, this autonomy was hierarchical. The apparent dispersion of power quickly dissolved into power rituals as when editors gathered in corners talking in a low voice (as opposed to their loud talk around frivolities). Also, when attending management meetings on the news stories alignment decisions, we were soon aware that there was a unison understanding about newsworthiness as if news values were universal and unquestionable. It seemed clear to all involved that a certain story mattered, and another did not. It was also clear that a certain angle of analysis was the correct one and not just a matter of perspective. In fact, these meetings had no real debates. Like most events, actors and voices provoked consensual reactions about their place in the news, which may help to explain how "how gendered power dynamics shape newsroom culture, often via tacit, ostensibly 'commonsensical' norms, values, and beliefs" (Cynthia Carter, Linda Steiner, and Stuart Allan 2019, xvii).

## Conclusions

Our research questions revolved around two main issues: observable elements of daily gender performance in the newsroom and the links between these performative elements of "doing gender" and forms of power, including a gendered production of organisational power. We explored these issues through an interactionist and feminist approach.

Four primary themes emerged from the participants' observed working life: newsroom environment; gender assumptions; issues of language; leadership, and power hierarchies. The observer herself took a phenomenological attitude in observing men and women journalists, continually reflecting on the interpretations of both her own experience as a woman and the phenomenon of gender construction in the newsroom. In focusing mostly on the interactional level, we also followed the insight by Silvia Gherardi (1995): organisations "do gender" in quite distinct ways from other interactionist situations.

Our findings support the notion that gender is not given but performed mostly according to institutionalised common practices and that these practices follow gender expectations and presuppositions. Thus, the newsroom not only provides a site for such performances as the communicative construction and display of gender arrangements but also becomes a "community of practice" (Holmes, 2006) which reinforces unequal social relations. Gender differences in interaction modes of communication within the newsroom should be understood as practices that infuse unequal daily interactions in the workplace.

Both men and women Portuguese journalists construct social beliefs and behaviours that sustain power relations in the newsroom. When considering Löfgren Nilsson's work in Sweden (2010), our observation shows fewer ambiguities in how journalists presuppose gender issues in their rituals and daily encounters. Although the neutral/objective stance to the profession will be similar, the observed newsroom environment, gender assumptions, and language issues show a more pronounced "doing" of gender within more traditional performances.

Another conclusion of our observation is that the newsroom power hierarchy perceived as horizontal and dispersed among journalists is performed on traditional (male) shared values while giving the idea that everyone equally participates in decision-making. We have also observed that women journalists do gender in more diverse and less essentialist forms than their male colleagues. Yet, because the observed relational leadership did not show any signs of demanding systemic changes, this is indicative that "the ongoing issues of women's unequal participation in media industries and in its leadership will continue" (O'Brien 2017, 848).

On the other hand, since gender was observed as a social institution within the newsroom, this has at least the potential to be changed by women themselves. In moving beyond essential aspects of gender into its "doing," we found gender's political implications because, as West and Zimmerman have pointed out (2009, 114), if the gender attributes that sustain men's hegemony are social products, then they can be changed. As the increasing poststructuralist literature on "undoing gender" shows, it is because it is done that gender can be undone (Deutsch 2007; Butler 2004). Indeed, the meanings attached to gender (as in the case of race or class) come from "historically specific institutional and collective practices in the 'natural' (and thus, 'rightful') allocation of material and symbolic resources" (Fenstermaker and West 2002, 213). An important allocation of symbolic resources within the newsroom is precisely the power to change deep-seated understandings of what journalism is, of idealised forms of objectivity as gender-neutral and the power to accommodate gender difference in a way that does not undermine women's ability to act and lead in the newsroom.

Throughout our observations and interviews, Linda Steiner's words on imagining a feminist journalism echoed in our minds: "feminist theorising suggests the value of

more contextual and situated journalistic forms that get at reasons, consequences, and impacts and of collaborative, non-competitive, horizontal work structures that allow for integrating domestic responsibilities” (Steiner 2019, 464). Yet, despite some progress, we often found ourselves thinking that we were still quite far from this idealised and yet necessary way of doing news differently.

Finally, while generalisations cannot be made based on a small-scale national observation, our emphasis was on providing insights into how gender is performed in the newsroom.

Future research should also complement the limitations of the cultural generalizability of our study, as it is expected that national culture will play a role in how interaction is performed in the newsroom. Newsrooms’ sizes and environments may be different, and certainly, the political history, tradition and culture of a nation will weigh on how individuals do gender. While it is beyond the scope of the current study to examine if these cultural differences may emerge, future research should assess if gender as a process is constructed differently and what are the implications of possible variations in this specific component of gender construction in relation to other components of gender as a social institution and of gender in television journalism practice.

## Note

1. The project initially planned and did two observations in two different television newsrooms. However, due to insurmountable practical reasons, the second newsroom was only observed for one week, which was revealed to be too short to draw conclusions. It was therefore left out of the final project workings. To preserve anonymity, newsroom identification and specific details are omitted. The names of all participants have also been changed.

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