



Picture Source: www.militarycity.com

# Operation Free Iraq: A Gendered Content Analysis of Newspapers

Tricia Davis and Niki Jepson

University of Wisconsin – River Falls

Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminal Justice



Picture Source: www.militarycity.com

## Abstract

Women have been historical underrepresented in the field of journalism, and it is journalists we mostly rely upon when hearing information concerning war. With the gendered imbalance that exists in journalism, it leads us to question whether we are getting a full picture of what is happening in the war-field. A content analysis of three major newspapers was conducted to investigate:

- ❖ Do men and women write differently from the war field?
- ❖ If they do, what are the consequences of the gender inequality that exists?
- ❖ And, how might a gender-imbalanced reporting structure shape the public's perception about war?

## Review of the Literature

- Males and females are socialized into dichotomous roles, in which the learned roles of females are less valued by society than those of males (Cohn 1993).
- Women from large newspapers are more likely to frame and source their work similar to that of their male colleagues; women from smaller newspapers do not. This difference is attributed to the male dominated hierarchical structure of larger papers and the more gender based socialization of small papers (Rodgers and Thorson 2003).
- Women often work in areas of journalism that can be considered an extension of their domestic responsibilities and their socially assigned qualities of care nurturing, and humanity (Zoonen 1998).

Because of the limited exposure women have had to the reporting of war in the past, there is little knowledge of the gender differences that exist between the reporting of female and male journalists in war.

## Research Questions

- ❖ Are there textual features that distinguish articles written by males and female journalists in the war-field?
- ❖ And, if there are do these differences give the public a different impression on what is happening in the war?

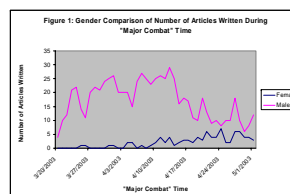
## Methodology

A content analysis, using DICTION, of three U.S. daily newspapers was conducted. The dates examined involved the time of the "major combat operations" defined by President George W. Bush as March 19 to May 1, 2003.

DICTION is a computerized, dictionary-based program that can probe text at a much deeper and subtler level than the ordinary person can. By using this approach, specific words that journalists use in their writing can be assumed to be particularly illustrative of the themes being conveyed in their stories, giving the reader a certain image of what is going on.

## Results

During the 44 day period analyzed, there were 740 articles written by male journalists, and 88 articles written by female journalists. Figure 1 illustrates the difference in the number of articles written by gender across the given time period. The majority of articles written by female journalists were written towards the end of the "major combat" period, possibly indicating that there were less female journalists imbedded with the invading military units.



## Male and Female Comparisons

Analysis found that male and female journalists write very similarly *in general*, which may indicate that men and women have had the same type of training to be journalists. What is interesting to look at, however, is that there are significant differences in the words that male and female journalists use when writing about the war from Iraq.

### Female Journalists' Writing

- Female journalists employ a language of personal resolve, using more self-reference and more assured verb forms.
- Female journalists write from the war-field using less inspiring and more restrained words of possibility.
- Female journalists use more adjectives that reflect praise; indicating that the women's stories are more likely to be filled with statements of affirmation for a person or group.
- Female journalists are more grounded in what has already happened in the war, as well as in the moment, while being more personable and focusing on the people in the war-field.
- Female journalists use less inspiring but more affirmative statements than male journalists, making the picture of what is going on a little more bleak.

### Male Journalists' Writing

- Male journalists write from the war-field using more numerical terms to support the facts in observations they make.
- Male journalists are more concrete and utilize words of physical energy in their stories that gives the reader an image of competition and social domination.
- Male journalists write their stories using everyday words that the readers will be familiar with while also placing the reader in the geographical space.
- Male journalists are more likely to use words that maximizes individual choice, not focusing on individual differences.

## Conclusions

The results seem to suggest that even though men and women have similar training to be journalists, and thus write similarly, the overall words they use while writing *about* the war in Iraq illustrates a difference in the themes being conveyed in their stories. Men's writing focuses on aggression while women's writing focuses on human interest; thus, giving the reader different images of what is taking place in the war-field.

Since the evidence shows that stories written by female journalists in Iraq were underrepresented, and since the results of our research found that differences *do* exist between the writing of male and female journalists in Iraq - the public's perception of the war is skewed to a male journalist's perspective and images of the war.

## Bibliography

- Cohn, Carol. 1993. "Wars, Wimps, and Women: Talking Gender and Thinking War." Pp. 227-246 in *Gendering War Talk*, edited by Niriarn Cooke and Angela Woollacott. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rodgers, Shelly and Esther Thorson. 2003. "A Socialization Perspective on Male and Female Reporting." *Journal of Communication* 53(4):658-675.
- Zoonen, Liesbet van. 1998. "One of the Girls? The Changing Gender of Journalism." Pp. 33-46 in *News, Gender and Power*, edited by Cynthia Carter, Gill Branston and Stuart Allan. New York: Routledge.

