

## **The Feminine Voice**

### **In Global Journalism: The Example of Ukraine**

---

**Nicole Wiart**

#### **Abstract**

This study is designed to identify whether there is a discrepancy between the number of female and male journalists reporting on the crisis in Ukraine. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis, as well as primary and secondary research, the paper brings attention to gender differences in crisis reporting, and explain how those gendered differences affect the interpretation of a conflict. Previous research shows women are more inclined to cover crises from a human interest or human suffering standpoint, whereas men cover crises through politics and violence. The study concludes that while the majority of journalists reporting on the Ukraine crisis for *The New York Times* are male, it does not find a concrete correlation between the primary focus of the sample articles and the gender of the journalist. This analysis provides a starting point for future research, as well as a new perspective on a modern conflict heavily covered by North American media.

#### **Introduction**

Global journalism is a relatively new phenomenon. With the advent of Information Communication Technologies (ICT), such as The Internet, journalism is now a practice of “ongoing relations,” making it into an “everyday routine to investigate how people and their actions, practices, problems, life conditions etc. in different parts of the world are interrelated” (Berglez, 2008, p. 846-7). But where do female journalists fit in this phenomenon? The following research looks at how gender differences apply to the reporting of global crises, and whether there is a discrepancy in the number of men and women who participate in global journalism. And, if women are underrepresented in global journalism, will the international reports, specifically on the Ukraine crisis, focus more on violence and unrest than on human suffering?

Gender equality has been a constant debate in journalism—repeatedly identifying an overall bias between the number of practicing male and female journalists. A survey conducted by the American Society of News Editors, revealed women were only 36.9 per cent of the overall journalistic workforce (Table L, 2012). And in crisis reporting, this percentage is even less. “Women [are] able to receive recognition in newsrooms mostly by relying on the types of stories believed to be more appropriate for them,” (Volz & Lee, 2013, p. 250) and not the types deemed appropriate for men, such as crisis reporting. This research investigates whether this discrepancy in the number of male and female journalists had an effect on the reporting of the Ukraine crisis.

### Research Questions

This paper answers the following questions:

RQ1: Are women accurately represented as journalists in global crisis reporting?

RQ2: Does the information in international reports reflect gender differences?

RQ3: What is the female journalist place in the emergent transnational news sphere?

### Definition of Terms & Theories

*Crisis*, Hellman & Riegert (2012) define *global crises* as “mediatized events demanding responses disregarding national borders, like disasters, famine, financial meltdowns, rising poverty, energy shortages, refugee movements, armed conflicts, and terror attacks” (p. 156). According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), crises are difficult or dangerous situations that need serious attention. The crisis in Ukraine is an armed conflict, which has now demanded an international response.

*Ritual Theory*, Riegert and Olsson (2007) define *ritual theory* as when the purpose of communication as:

Not so much the transmission of useful, intelligible information, but the creation of meaning, and the expression of commonality (or ostracism) among members of a community. The media’s role has to do with the maintenance of society through time, representing shared beliefs, understandings and emotions, whether in celebration or in mourning. (p. 144)

The idea that journalism creates symbolic meaning through recurring patterns, and that the meaning is shared by an audience, will help to better explain how gender interpretations of events can change the perceptions of those viewing or reading the report.

*Gendered Mediation*, according to Gidengil and Everitt (2003) *gendered mediation theory* “rests on the assumption that the way in which politics is reported is significantly determined by a male-oriented agenda that privileges the practice of politics as an essentially male pursuit” (p. 210). The researchers also said gendered mediation treats male perspectives as the norm. The researchers look at this theory through political examples, but it can be applied to the research of crises in this paper.

*Gatekeeping Theory*, this theory “refers to the process by which some news events are selected for presentation, while others are rejected” (Sutcliff, Lee, & Soderlund, 2005, p. 103). The impact of gender on which stories make the press, and which ones do not, can lead to only one, gendered perspective reaching an audience. Sutcliff et al. (2005) asked: “to what extents are issues pertaining to

women considered to be newsworthy?" (p. 103). If they are newsworthy, then are they produced by men, or by women?

*Framing Theory*, the articles will be analyzed by looking at the focus on human suffering, violence, and politics, using Höijer's (2004) research, on how events are framed depending on gender. This form of deductive framing is defined by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) as an "approach [involving] predefining certain frames as content analytic variables to verify the extent to which these frames occur in the news" (p. 94). The advantages of this approach is that it is easily replicated on large samples and is effective in detecting framing differences in mass media (p. 95).

### **Literature Review**

In "The Discourse of Global Compassion: The Audience and Media Reporting of Human Suffering," Höijer (2004) explored the role media plays in exposing global crises; and in turn, the affect it has on a global audience. Höijer (2004) believed global journalism has "changed fundamentally from mainly reporting military aspects, such as strategies and weapon systems, to reporting with a greater focus on people" (p. 515). For the purpose of this research, Höijer's (2004) comparison of how news is interpreted differently, by females and males, will be drawn upon further in the primary research. She said women "construct the moral problem for human action in conflicts and choice situations as a problem of care and responsibility" and "surrender to feelings of sorrow, pain, and compassion" (p. 526), whereas men "construct the moral problem as one of rights and rules and they reason about justice more than care" (p. 527).

Turley (2006) researched the need to promote gender equality in both who are displayed in media, and who does the displaying. She discussed the need for a "wide-scale social and political transformation, in which women's rights—and particularly women's communication rights—are truly understood, respected, and implemented both in society at large and by media" (p. 14). Turley (2006) called for equality when it comes to promoting gender vision, and looked to change the way issues are gendered in the media. (p. 12). Similar to Höijer (2004), Turley (2006) saw a disparity in the news produced by men and the news produced by women. Turley (2006) said "'soft' issues like culture and the arts are mainly consigned to women media practitioners, whereas 'hard' and therefore 'serious' issues like finance, economics and politics are more likely to be within the purview of their male counterparts" (p. 12).

Sutcliff et al. (2005) researched the effect that a reporter's sex has on coverage of an event (p.100). The researchers argue "the underrepresentation of women as reporters and sources of news has the potential to affect the stories that get reported by the way in which they are reported, as well as public perceptions of the place of women in international events" (p. 119), adding, that this underrepresentation instills the idea there is no place for women in global

conflict (p. 100). Through in depth research of seven case studies of crisis reporting on various American news channels, Sutcliff et al. (2005) found on average, 11 per cent of sources were female, and around 30 to 31 per cent of reporters and anchors were female (p. 108-9). However, they came to the conclusion "in each case, there was an overall similarity in news reporting in terms of the issues covered, the information provided, the images shown, and even the language used by female and male reporters" (p. 117).

"Emerging Transnational News Spheres in Global Crisis Reporting," by Hellman and Riegert (2012), argued that "the role of transnational news channels for emerging transnational mediated spheres are to be found in the impact they have on national and local media structures and institutions" (p. 171). Because the samples chosen for this research paper are from online sources, the paper draws from Hellman and Riergert's (2012) analysis of how digital media convergence has affected global crises reporting, and how "the supply of information or the flows of what *could* turn into international news has grown tremendously with the number of new sources able to publish what is going on in the world" (p. 169).

### **Methodology**

The articles chosen for the primary research portion of this study all dealt with the Ukraine crisis, were non-opinion, and were published online by *The New York Times* between February 18 and February 28 of 2014. Cohen (2012) argued that one newspaper cannot "represent all the potential major (central) newspapers in Russia, China, India, or the United States" (p. 539), but for the purpose of this study, only *The New York Times* will be analyzed. Ideally, a second print-based news organization would also be analyzed, but few North American newspapers matched the size and scope of *The New York Times*, and many pulled coverage of the Ukraine crisis from news agencies such as *Reuters* or *American Press*. The focus remained on North American media due to cultural inconsistencies, because comparative research with a European media outlet, could affect the study as "most events would likely be presented at least somewhat differently in different countries...they would be presented differently even within a country, in different newspapers, on different television or radio channels, and in different news portals" (Cohen, 2012, p. 538).

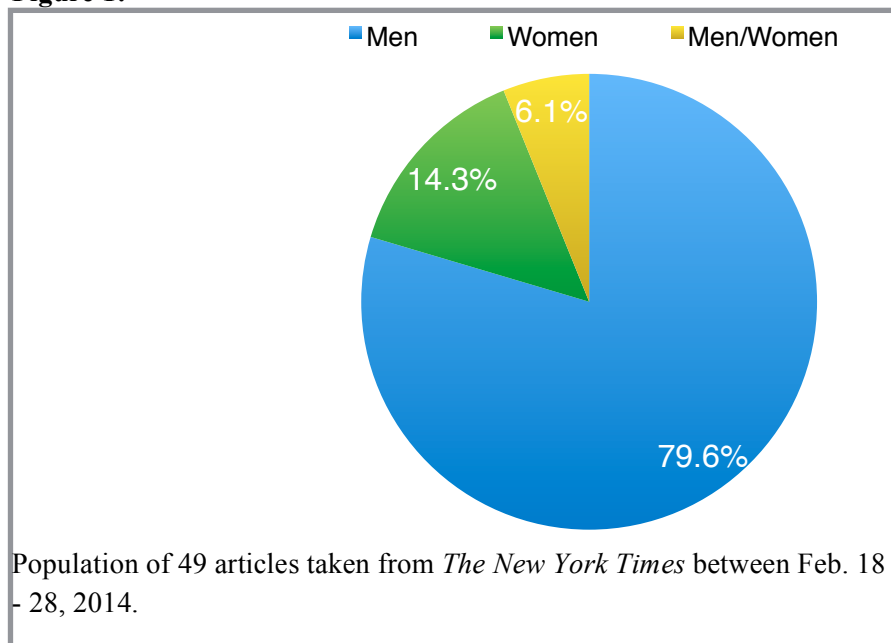
The crisis in Ukraine is often pegged as beginning in 1991, when the Ukrainian parliament declared independence from USSR. Now, nearly 23 years later, tensions have grown, and hundreds more have died. The dates chosen for this study were decided upon because of the level of activity and seriousness of the conflict, and the length of 11 days was chosen because "ideally, samples should be larger than one week" (Cohen, 2012, p. 539). Between February 18 and February 28 of 2014, thousands of protesters stormed Kyiv, hundreds died, and (at the time) Ukrainian President Yanukovich disappeared (Ukraine Crisis Timeline, 2014). *The New York Times* published 49 non-opinion articles online

focusing specifically on the crisis in these 11 days. Ten articles were chosen at random as a sample from the initial population of 49 (n=10) to be further textually analyzed to see if gender references were evident.

**Results**

Of the 49 articles published by *The New York Times*, 39 were written by men, 7 were written by women, and 3 were a co-written by men and women. As displayed in Figure 1, the chart indicates less than 15 per cent of the articles were written solely by a female journalist. As mentioned previously, Sutcliff et al. (2005) found on average, 30 to 31 per cent of reporters and anchors covering a crisis were female (p. 108-9); that is double the findings in this study. However, due to the small sample size and time frame of this research, the results cannot be generalized to crisis coverage outside of this study.

**Figure 1:**



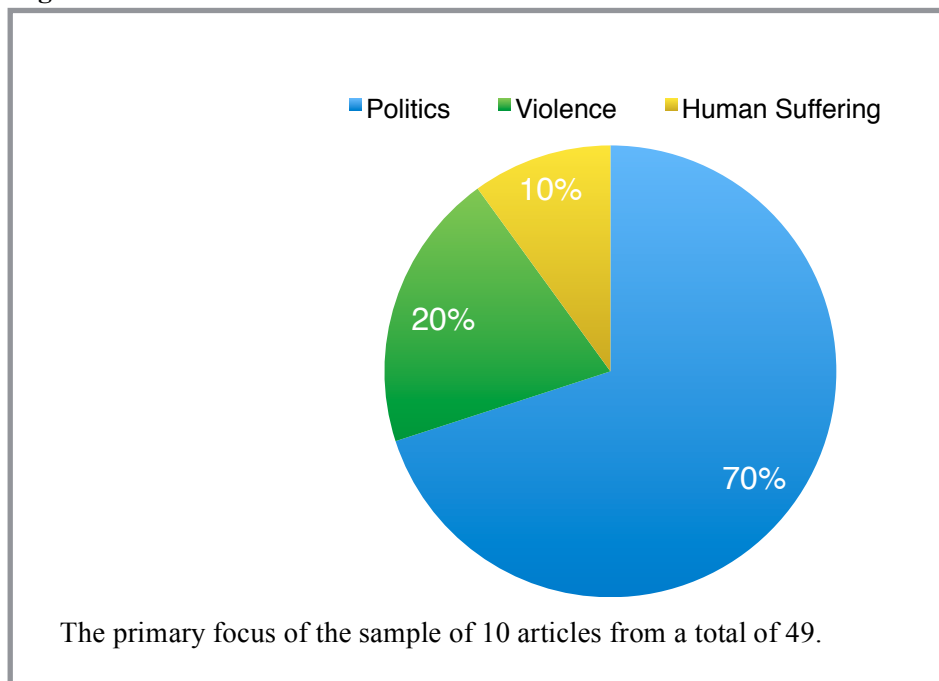
The 10 articles chosen (n=10) from the 49, 2 (20 per cent) were either written or co-written by a women to maintain the same percentage as was seen in the population size. They were textually analyzed to determine if there were differences in the way the articles were framed depending on whether it was a man or a woman reporting.

On February 22, Alison Smale (2014), Berlin Bureau Chief for *The New York Times*, led her article "Lviv, in Western Ukraine, Mourns One of Its Own Killed in Kiev" by focusing directly on the death of a 28-year-old university lecturer—in

this way, putting a human face on the crisis. In contrast, David Herszenhorn (2014), a journalist based in Moscow, wrote an article on February 23, titled “Ukraine Rushes to Shift Power and Mend Rifts,” which led with how Ukrainian lawmakers were working to assert control over the government. On February 22, the lede for Andrew Higgins article read: “As ranks of riot police officers, Interior Ministry troops and even the president vanished from the capital, Ukraine slipped, with often-*eerie* calm after months of tumultuous protests and a week of bloody mayhem, into the hands of revolution.”

Using these three examples, Höjjer’s (2004) research comes into effect: Smale’s (2014) article focuses mainly on human suffering, Herszenhorn’s (2014) on politics, and Higgins’ (2014) on violence. However, on February 27, in an article written by White House correspondent Helene Cooper (2014), the main focus was on the United States’ warning to Russia to stay out of the turmoil in Ukraine—primarily a political approach, which Höjjer (2004) would consider a male perspective, despite the journalist being female.

**Figure 2:**



Of the remaining articles, all written by men, five focused primarily on politics, one on the country’s violence, and none on human suffering. Figure 2 depicts the primary focus of all of the articles (n=10). It is important to note, all of the articles in the sample touched on the political background and violence in Ukraine at some point. The *primary* focus was determined based on the headline and lede.

## Discussion

*Representation of Women in Journalism*, the following discussion addresses the results pertaining to the first research question: Are women accurately represented as journalists in global crisis reporting? As mentioned earlier in this study, nearly 37 per cent of the journalist workforce is female (American Society of News Editors, 2012, Table L), yet, according to the results of this research, less than 20 per cent of the articles written for *The New York Times* focusing on Ukraine's crisis were written by women (including the articles co-written by women). Although this study is limited in its size and scope, it provides a sliver of insight into the underrepresentation of women in crisis reporting.

*Gender Differences*, the following discussion seeks to answer the second research question: Does the information in international reports reflect gender differences? Because of the size of this research, the findings cannot be generalized to all international reports. However, Gidengil and Everitt's (2003) use of gendered mediation theory "recognizes that, far from being gender-neutral, conventional news frames treat the male as normative" (p. 210). Covering the Ukraine crisis through a political frame, or a violence frame, is significantly more common than a human interest frame. As is evident in the textual analysis, only one of the 10 articles that covered the crisis was through a human interest frame, and it was written by a woman. The second article, written by a woman, covered the crisis through a political lens, an observation that does not line up with the thesis of this research. However, this discrepancy calls for another question: Did Cooper (2014) frame her article politically because that is the *norm*? According to Riegert and Olsson (2007), "the media's role has to do with the maintenance of society through time, representing shared beliefs, understandings and emotions, whether in celebration or in mourning" (p. 144), adding the ultimate purpose of ritual is reinforcing the importance and authority of journalism in society (p. 146). If the norm of a news report is typically framed as masculine, is it not the journalist's responsibility, male or female, to deliver a news report that reflects the needs and demands of society?

*The Female Journalists' Place*, the following discussion addresses the final research question: What is the female journalists' place in the emergent transnational news sphere? With a less than equal representation of women in Ukraine, coverage from *The New York Times* favors a male perspective. But is that a negative thing? Hellman and Riegert (2012) contend it is more important to cover the political reasoning behind a crisis than to cover it from a human interest point of view:

The increasing focus on human interest in conflict and crisis coverage to increase audience size allows for only superficial coverage, with a universal appeal, focusing on human suffering rather than on its causes or consequences. Such narratives make suffering from global crises seem inevitable and therefore

a generic feature of the developing world, rather than something that could be stopped. (p. 160)

While Hellman and Riegert (2012) conclude there is not a place for a stereotypical female perspective in transnational reporting, that does not mean there isn't a place for female journalists. As seen by *The New York Times*'s examples, both Smale (2014) and Cooper (2014) were able to offer differing perspectives despite their gender.

### **Conclusion**

The topic of gender equality in journalism began before the advent of ICTs, and before the explosion of globalized news networks. While male journalists outnumber female journalists in the overall workforce, according to this research, the number significantly increases in a crisis setting. However, through the research, no concrete evidence was found to validate the claim that women frame crises differently from men. Of the 10 articles analyzed, one did follow a typically *female* frame, and it was written by a female journalist. The other article written by a female journalist used a typically *male* frame.

There are many factors that could play a role in the underrepresentation of female journalists on crises beats, including safety, desire, and need. Those factors have not been analyzed in this research, and could offer reasons as to why there are a small number of women reporting on the crisis in Ukraine. While the research in this paper is not extensive enough to apply to a larger population, it does bring attention to the need for future research on gendered differences in crisis reporting, possibly using deductive framing analysis as outlined by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). An in depth look at the dominant, male-oriented perspective of global crisis reporting, would better explain the effects on an audience, as well as challenge Hellman and Riegert's (2012) conclusion, that cause is more important to report than human interest, and whether, gender aside, it is the journalist's responsibility to frame the news in a way that is accessible to society as a whole.

### **References**

- American Society of News Editors (2012). Employment of men and women by job category [Table L]. Retrieved from: <http://asne.org/content.asp?pl=140&sl=144&contentid=144>
- BBC. (March 7, 2014). Ukraine Crisis Timeline. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275>
- Berglez, P. (2008). What is global journalism? *Journalism Studies*, 9(6), 845-858. doi: 10.1080/14616700802337727
- Cohen, A. (2012). Benefits and pitfalls of comparative research on news: Production, content, and audiences. In I. Volkmer (Ed.), *The Handbook of Global Media Research*. (pp. 533-546). Chichester, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.



- Cooper, H. (2014, February 27). Hagen warns Russia not to intervene in Ukraine. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/28/world/europe/hagel-warns-russia-not-to-intervene-in-ukraine.html>
- Crisis. (n.d.). In Merriam-Webster's online dictionary (ed). Retrieved from: <http://www.merria-webster.com/dictionary/crisis>
- Gidengil, E., & Everitt, J. (2003). Talking tough: Gender and reported speech in campaign news coverage. *Political Communication*, 20(3), 209.
- Hellman, M. & Riegert, K. (2012). Emerging transnational news spheres in global crisis reporting: A research agenda. In I. Volkmer (Ed.), *The Handbook of Global Media Research*. (pp. 156-174). Chichester, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Herszenhorn, D. (2014, February 23). Ukraine rushes to shift power and mend rifts. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/24/world/europe/ukraine.html>
- Higgins, A. (2014, February 22). With President's departure, Ukraine looks toward a murky future. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/23/world/Europe-with-presidents-departure-ukraine-looks-toward-a-murky-future.html>
- Höijer, B. (2004). The discourse of global compassion: The audience and media reporting of human suffering. *Media, Culture & Society*, 26(4), 513-531. doi: 10.1177/0163443704044215
- Riegert, K., & Olsson, E. (2007). The importance of ritual in crisis journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 1(2), 143-158. doi:10.1080/17512780701275457
- Semetko, H. A., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2000). Framing European politics: A content analysis of press and television news. *Journal Of Communication*, 50(2), 93-109. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/%28ISSN%291460-2466>
- Smale, A. (2014, February 22). Lviv, in western Ukraine, mourns one of its own killed in Kiev. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/23/world/europe/lviv-in-western-ukraine-mourns-one-of-its-own-killed-in-kiev.html>
- Sutcliffe, J. B., Lee, M. F., & Soderlund, W. C. (2005). Women and crisis reporting. *International Journal Of Press/Politics*, 10(3), 99. doi:10.1177/1081180X05279147
- Turley, A. (2006). Who makes the news? Promoting gender equality in and through news media. *Pacific Journalism Review*, 12(1), 10-14.