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Citation: Blumell, L. E. & Mulupi, D. (2024). How News Organizations Cultivate and Maintain Sexist Newsrooms via Gendered Journalistic Norms, Sexual Harassment, and the Boys' Club. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 47(3), pp. 268-291. doi: 10.1080/07491409.2024.2342842

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Permanent repository link: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/33369/>

Link to published version: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2024.2342842>

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How News Organizations Cultivate and Maintain Sexist Newsrooms via Gendered Journalistic Norms, Sexual Harassment, and the Boys' Club

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Abstract

This study used in-depth interviews and focus groups of editors and journalists in Kenya (N = 55) to show how news organizations fail to prioritize gender equality. All participants identified a gendered hierarchy in newsrooms, which participants believed connects to other inequalities such as story assignment, pay, safety, and promotion. Most women participants had experienced sexual harassment at work multiple times. Participants also stated exclusive socialization for men, aka a “boys’ club,” was central to how newsrooms function and advantaged men in terms of building networks, promotions, scoops, work assignments, and increased job security. By linking the various negative outcomes of gendered work environments, this study adds to feminist communication scholarship by showing how organizations reinforce gendered inequalities rather than eliminating them. It also calls on gatekeeping research to focus on meso- and macro-level influences as a necessary shift away from placing responsibility on the individual level alone.

Keywords: hierarchy of influences, organizations, gendered norms, sexual harassment, Kenya, socialization

Reducing gendered inequalities in the news industry is an ongoing struggle in several countries around the world. Years of scholarship and activism show several underlying factors that contribute to this, which this study categorizes into three broad interconnected areas: Gendered journalistic norms (Attenborough, 2013; Byerly, 2011; Craft & Wanta, 2004; Freedman & Fico 2005; Finneman & Jenkins, 2018; Melki & Hitti, 2021), sexual harassment (International Women's Media Foundation, 2013; North, 2016; Women in News, n.d.), and exclusive socialization for men (Djerf-Pierre, 2007; Lobo, Silveirinha, Torres da Silva & Subtil, 2017; North, 2009a; 2009b; Vandenberghe, d'Haenens & Van Gorp, 2017).

This study uses the term gendered journalistic norms as the focus is on journalistic routines that are enacted based on existing gender roles (Heise et al., 2019). Cislighi and Heise (2020) state that generally gendered norms are learnt in childhood and then reinforced throughout one's life, including in the workplace. Moreover, gendered norms are strongly embedded within institutions, perpetuate inequitable power dynamics, and are enacted through social interactions (Cislighi & Heise, 2020). It is thus important to examine gendered journalistic norms and their connected consequences such as sexual harassment and exclusive socialization for men within news organizations that reinforce gendered systems.

These areas are interconnected and rooted in maintaining power structures dominated by men. Although we include all people in measuring sexual harassment and acknowledge that sexual harassment happens between and within all genders, sexual harassment disproportionately affects women and is disproportionately perpetrated by men (Roscigno, 2019; Willness, Steel & Lee, 2007). Moreover, despite increased awareness of men (Monteith, Gerber, Brownstone, Soberay & Bahraini 2019) and queer survivors (Ison, 2019), many false ideas about sexual harassment or sexual harassment myths are built on gendered

norms and stereotypes that position men as not responsible for their actions and women as asking for it or secretly wanting it (LeMaire, Oswald & Russell, 2016; Lonsway, Cortina & Magley, 2008). Exclusive socialization for men, aka the “boys’ club,” is often downplayed as harmless social interaction, but it plays a key role in maintaining men’s dominance over women and non-binary people. Specifically, it gives men greater organizational opportunities, decision-making power, and access to social networks (Fisher & Kinsey, 2014). Collectively, all these areas feed into and are the result of gendered journalistic norms.

To eliminate gendered inequalities, systemic changes must be made. Many ad hoc initiatives over the years have improved the status of women in newsrooms, but a complete shift in organizational culture needs to happen. Just as news organizations invest robustly in professional practices to maintain credibility, they need to be similarly invested in eliminating all forms of gendered inequalities. This includes understanding intersectional factors that impact gender such as race, class, disability, experience, and so forth (Shields, 2008). This study uses levels of gatekeeping (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009) and hierarchy of influences (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014) to examine how organizational forces operate in newsroom environments to maintain gendered inequalities. Thus, in contrast to existing literature that overemphasizes the role of the individual in maintaining gendered inequalities, our study emphasizes the role of the organization.

Gatekeeping was adapted to journalism to explain the whittling down process of several potential news stories to what passes through the gate to the public (White, 1950). In the 70 years since then, gatekeeping has expanded to situate the gatekeeper in complex systems that include many internal and external forces that impact the gatekeeping process (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014; Vos & Heinderyckx, 2015). Sexism in journalism is well-

documented in the literature. Sexism in journalism encompasses individual sexist attitudes (Blumell & Mulupi, 2021; 2022), gendered routines (Armstrong, 2004; Freedman & Fico, 2005; Freedman, Fico & Durisin, 2010; Ross, 2001), organizational hierarchical structures that are often patriarchal and dominated by men (Byerly, 2011; 2013; Ireri, 2017a), public spheres that are also often patriarchal and dominated by men (Einspahr, 2010), and cultural ideologies that normalize sexism in societies (Gilligan & Richards, 2008).

This study specifically examines how the organizational level, as identified in the levels of gatekeeping (Shoemaker, 1991) and the hierarchy of influences model (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014), impacts gendered inequalities in newsrooms. In contrast, existing literature has examined gendered inequalities at the routines and individual levels (Correa & Harp, 2011; Hanitzsch & Hanusch, 2012; Rodgers & Thorson, 2003). Thus, this study makes a necessary shift toward holding organizations, specifically news organizations, responsible for the work environments they normalize. This study illustrates how gendered inequalities operate at the organizational level in Kenyan newsrooms by drawing on in-depth interviews and focus groups of journalists and editors ($N = 55$). This study thus adds to previous research that has shown that sexual harassment and gendered inequalities are major issues in the Kenyan news industry (Media Council of Kenya, 2015).

Kenyan Newsrooms

Kenya has a long-established functioning press that began with British settlers in the nineteenth century (Ochilo, 1993). In the early twentieth century, African language publications began to challenge colonial power (Oriare, Okello-Orale & Ugungu, 2010). After independence in 1963, the one-party state in Kenya heavily limited press freedom

(Wanyande, 1995). When political pluralism began in the 1990s, privately owned companies were legalized, and the Kenyan press expanded (Musau, 1998).

There are five dominant media houses in Kenya: Nation Media Group, Standard Media Group, Royal Media Services, Radio Africa Group, and Mediamax (Obuya & Ong'ondo, 2019). The concentration of media ownership raises concerns about media accountability in journalism (Obuya, 2012; Obuya & Ong'ondo, 2019; Simiyu, 2014). Media concentration also limits diversity in news coverage. For instance, a content analysis of Daily Nation and The Standard newspapers showed highly correlated news agendas (Ileri, Ongus, Laboso, Mwit & Onsongo, 2017). Nevertheless, Kenyan journalists emphasize their role as disseminators in society by placing the utmost importance on providing the public with information and advocating for social change (Ileri, 2017a).

Kenya ranked 116th out of 180 countries on the World Press Freedom Index in 2023—based on political, economic, legislative, social, and security indicators (Reporters Without Borders, n.d.). Physical threats to news personnel are common and legislation has increased government surveillance and interference in the media industry (Ogenga, 2010). Another major obstacle is the use of bribery, known as “brown envelopes” (Ileri, 2016a). A national survey of Kenyan journalists showed that 77% of participants believed bribery to be commonplace and politicians are the main source of it (Ileri, 2016a). This is further compounded by low average salaries for Kenyan journalists (Ileri, 2016b).

Past research shows that journalistic gendered inequalities have been a major issue in Kenya for decades (Worthington, 1995; Blumell & Mulupi, 2021). The Media Council of Kenya (2015) has a mandate to address this issue. Their research shows that news narratives are centered on men, most bylines are by men, few women are in leadership positions, and

most news personnel are not aware of gender policies in their workplace (Media Council of Kenya, 2015). Other survey research also confirms the industry is dominated by men (Ileri, 2017b). Moreover, in a national survey of news personnel, only 25% of respondents indicated their supervisor was a woman (Women in News, n.d.).

There is limited research on intersectionality and gender within the Kenyan news industry. One study that examined online harassment of journalists found most attacks targeted women, but that some also included gendered and racial slurs (Zviyita & Mapudzi, 2023). Outside media research, general research on Kenya has examined gender and other factors such as age, class, and geographic locations (McCollum et al., 2019).

Organizational Level of Analysis

Though this study focuses specifically on Kenya, it incorporates relevant literature from various countries around the world. This is useful because:

1. literature is limited in the Kenyan context (Miller et al., 2013),
2. previous research shows global patterns regarding the status of women in newsrooms (International Women's Media Foundation, 2013), and
3. findings from this and other non-Western studies make important theoretical contributions to understanding how sexism is maintained at the organizational level.

Gatekeeping is a layered process with many internal and external forces influencing news production (Shoemaker, 1991). Gatekeeping and its forces are also fluid and evolve with changing societies and technologies (Shoemaker, 2020). The levels of gatekeeping are the individual, routines, organizational, social institutional, and social system (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Similarly, Shoemaker and Reese (2014) identified the hierarchy of influences

model that comprises of the same five levels. The individual level measures the gatekeeper's individual characteristics, decision-making processes, ideologies, role conception, etc. (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). The routines level focuses on the rules (often unwritten) that guide gatekeepers in their daily work such as deadlines, writing styles, journalistic norms, and news construction (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). The organizational level enforces the rules and is responsible for human resources (Shoemaker, 1991). The macro levels of gatekeeping are the social institutional and social system levels. The social institutional level forces are governments, markets, sources, public relations, advertisers, interest groups, and so forth (Shoemaker, 1991; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Vos & Russell (2019) further develop this level by identifying the power relationships between gatekeepers and journalists and their impacts on journalism, thus emphasizing the contextual importance of these forces. The social system level includes culture, social structures, and societal ideologies (Shoemaker, 1991; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

A major difference between the levels of gatekeeping and the hierarchy of influences model is that the latter model proposes that the five levels have varying degrees of impact. Reese (2007) further explains that the hierarchy of influences extends beyond journalism to media sociology, which focuses on how mediated environments are constructed, "within a social, occupational, institutional, and cultural context—with special application to the practice of journalism" (p. 31). Since this study focuses on how the organizational level influences gendered journalistic inequalities in the news industry, it takes literature from the levels of gatekeeping and hierarchy of influences that focus on the organizational level. This is to maximize the literature on the organizational level found in both.

Journalists often temper their own personal opinions or behaviors to comply with practices of the industry (called routines) and the organization for which they work (Schudson, 1989; Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim & Wrigley, 2001). For instance, Tandoc (2018) und stated that “...procedural, professional, and organizational influences operate closer to journalists’ day-to-day operation” (p. 2354). The tensions that can exist between the individual and their organization can be amplified during efforts for social change (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016). Thus, the issues of gendered inequalities continue in news organizations despite the MeToo and TimesUp movements. For example, Chen et al. (2020) found that the increasing organizational demand on journalists to promote their work online as part of their journalistic routines, was met with little to no organizational support for online harassment that women journalists face. Moreover, limited resources can also lead to a lack of organizational support while still pressuring journalists to perform according to market demands (Kunert, Brueggemann, Frech, Lilienthal, & Loosen, 2022).

Implementing rules for news personnel, setting boundaries, human relations, and ultimately shaping the working environment occurs at the organizational level (Shoemaker, 1991; Reese, 2007). Breed’s (1955) functional analysis of newsroom social control maps out the hierarchical power dynamics of newsrooms and concludes that newsrooms generally thrive on uniformity, which is enforced by institutional authority, employee loyalty, personal aspirations, collegiality, and a general understanding of news values. Some of the boundaries set by organizations are a result of corporate and commercial pressures (Eliasoph, 1988), as journalism is first a business for news organizations (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Boundary setting has also been observed as news organizations expand to social media platforms (Russell, 2019). News personnel are not necessarily happy with boundaries set by

organizations, but they generally follow them (Gade & Perry, 2003; Hansen, Neuzil & Ward, 1998). However, Jost and Koehler (2021) found in a content analysis that journalists can subtly influence their news output while still being tethered to their organization.

How centrally located news personnel are in the organization determines their power (Berkowitz, 1990; Shoemaker, 1991). Experienced journalists generally have more autonomy to act than new journalists (Berkowitz & Limor, 2003). Nevertheless, journalists overall have a decreasing sense of newsroom autonomy (Willnat, Weaver & Wilhoit, 2019). This suggests studying the organizational level is increasingly important in journalism studies. As such, this study focuses on editors and journalists to understand if status within an organization impacts one's experiences and attitudes toward gendered inequalities.

Within sub-Saharan African news media contexts, Gondwe (2021) found that journalists seek to set the news agenda rather than looking for audience input. Furthermore, Gondwe, Ferrucci & Tandoc (2023) argue that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the individual level had a greater influence on news coverage in Zambia and Tanzania than the organizational level, with journalists and their editors having conflicting ideas about coverage. Nevertheless, in-depth interviews with Nigerian and South African journalists found that journalists collectively agreed that their news organizations set the tone for their work environments (Blumell & Mulupi, 2022). In Kenya, a survey of journalists showed varying degrees of perceived journalistic autonomy within their news organization, which was dependent upon gender, experience, education, and type of news media organization (Ileri, 2017c).

Gendered Organizational News Environments

The purpose of focusing on the organizational level of gatekeeping for this study is to identify gendered inequalities within Kenyan organizational news environments.

Organizational characteristics such as the demographics of the staff can influence the news (Correa & Harp, 2011; Leiva & Kimber, 2022; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Although this study focuses on the influence of gender, it is also important to note the intersectional impact of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and so forth.

Ongoing sociobiological perceptions of women and men have several consequences for environments in news organizations (Steiner, 2012). In this study, we position gendered journalistic norms, sexual harassment, and exclusive socialization of men as part of the organizational level of analysis because these are primary ways of sanctioning gendered inequalities within organizations (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020). Gendered cultural norms have been noted within the Kenyan media context, with traditions that position women as responsible for domestic tasks, regardless of employment (Kareithi, 2013). These social system influences transfer to organizational cultures and how newsrooms are impacted by gendered norms in Kenya (Kareithi, 2013).

Gendered journalistic norms. There are journalistic norms in the news industry that are currently influenced by the perceptions of gender (Attenborough, 2013). These norms feed into general audience expectations of how women and men in the news industry ought to adhere to the status quo—which includes appearance (Finneman & Jenkins, 2018). Several of these norms are classified as routines, as they describe the professionalized patterns of journalists (Shoemaker, 1991; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). This study includes routines as part of an organizational analysis because the focus isn't on the outcome or procedures of the

routines, but rather of how these routines are assigned and accessed by news personnel, which is ultimately determined by the organization.

There are several common newsroom routines that are enacted, or at least influenced, by gender. This includes how story assignments are often divided by hard and soft news in which men are assigned beats like politics and women are assigned human interest topics (Craft & Wanta, 2004). Newsgathering techniques such as source use, story topic, story angle, etc., privilege men and men's perspectives (Armstrong, 2004; Freedman & Fico 2005; Freedman, Fico, & Durisin 2010; Ross, 2001). This is despite findings that show women and men have similar professional conceptions of journalism in various countries (Hanitzsch & Hanusch, 2012), though women tend to include more variety of sources and use stereotyping less than men in similar positions (Blumell, 2019; Blumell & Cooper, 2019; Correa & Harp, 2011; Rodgers & Thorson, 2013).

Higher management and media ownership consist primarily of men (Byerly, 2011; 2013)—positions that logically have the most organizational influence. There is still a gender pay gap and women have fewer chances of advancement in the newsroom (Willnat et al., 2019).

Sexual harassment. One output of gendered norms in the workplace are increased levels of sexual harassment that disproportionately affect women—conceptualized within imbalanced power structures (Roscigno, 2019; Willness et al., 2007). Indeed, sexual harassment is common in the news industry (“Global Research Project,” 2013; Blumell et al., 2023). This study does not exclude that men and other people can also experience sexual harassment. All participants were asked about their experiences. Participants were also asked about gender identity to include gender beyond a binary.

Survey research on journalists show that sexual harassment in newsrooms is underreported and downplayed because the victim fears retaliation (North, 2016). A study from the International Women's Media Foundation and the International News Safety Institute showed that almost two-thirds of women participants have experienced some form of sexual harassment in the newsroom ("Global Research Project," 2013). In a study on conflict zones, 68% of women and 8% of men reported experienced sexual harassment (Harris, Mosdell, & Griffiths, 2016). Previous survey research on Kenya revealed that 78% of women and 30% men experienced sexual harassment in the newsroom (Blumell & Mulupi, 2021).

Exclusive Socialization of Men. Learning the norms and values of an organization is labelled as "organizational socialization," and news personnel "make decisions based on an organizational mind-set that is the result of organizational socialization" (Shoemaker, 1991, pp. 59-60). This study consequently proposes that systemic and unchecked gendered inequalities are not only the failure of the organization but are fostered by the organization that has socialized its employees to perpetrate sexism and accept them as norms.

For many years, women were shut out from journalism, or relegated to women's only lifestyle sections of publications (Franks, 2013). Journalists were even colloquially called "newsmen" (e.g. Jones, 1978). Research into so-called newsmen identified that social relationships with colleagues were a significant influence on journalistic values (Johnstone, Slawski, & Bowman, 1972). This exclusive socialization of men was part of a greater segregated society that limited or prevented women's entrance to the public sphere. During the Victorian era, as women's rights began to slowly advance, so did gendered spaces (Penner, 2001). There were women only railway cabins, bathrooms, bank windows, library

reading rooms, and so forth (Kogan, 2007). Consequently, socialization in professional spaces, like the news industry, was defined by how men interacted with each other and that fundamentally excluded women.

Scholarship on exclusive socialization of men in newsrooms has been documented in multiple countries. North (2009a) found a patriarchal hierarchy continues in Australian newsrooms, which is often invisible to those in power. Djerf-Pierre (2007) found similar findings in Sweden, where women ranked gender influencing work environments much higher than men. In Belgium, men rated inclusivity in news as a low priority (Vandenberghe, d'Haenens, & Van Gorp, 2017). In-depth interviews of Portuguese journalists found men and women believed in “natural” gender differences, and that the newsroom was general perceived as being dominated by men (Lobo et al., 2017). In the UK, Ross (2001) also found newsrooms to be dominated by men and as a result the importance of issues relating to women were downplayed. In these studies, and others, the underlying pattern emerges that while men generally have higher status in the newsroom, they also show less initiative to improve gender equality—especially in terms of exclusive socialization of men or what is often referred to as the “boys’ club.”

Understanding the patterned areas of gendered inequalities in news industries, this study investigates:

RQ1: How do the participants describe newsroom environments in relation to:

- a) Gendered journalistic norms
- b) Sexual harassment
- c) Exclusive socialization of men

Method

This qualitative study utilized in-depth interviews and focus group discussions ($N = 55$). The data was partially collected via an in-person research project that included observations within Nairobi newsrooms. In terms of positionality, the first author is a feminist media scholar originally from Canada who specializes in how gender is enacted within journalism. The second author is Kenyan and worked in the Kenyan news industry before pursuing a PhD. Her primary research focus is on gender related issues in Sub-Saharan news industries.

Participant Selection

Before data collection began, ethical approval was obtained. In preparation for the research project, we identified potential participants (Kenyan journalists and editors) via e-mail, telephone, Whatsapp and other social media networks. Participants were also recruited through local networks of women news personnel such as the Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK) and via snowballing (Streeton, Cooke & Campbell, 2004). All potential participants were provided information about the study, our contact information, and offered guarantees of confidentiality. Pseudonyms are used for all participants in this study.

In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews are a special type of planned conversational interactions that enable researchers to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of informants by probing questions on a topic of interest (Kvale, 2011). For this study, in-depth interviews were used as part of the initial information gathering stage and during data collection in Kenya. In-depth interviews were employed for this study as a useful methodology for collecting preliminary information prior to conducting the in-person research, and to collect in-depth data (Wengraf, 2011) of the editors and anyone not wanting to participate in a focus group.

Two rounds of interviews were conducted. The first round was via telephone between November 2018 and March 2019. The second round of interviews involved a mix of in-person interviews conducted in Nairobi, Kenya in December 2019 and telephone interviews between February and March 2020. There was a total of 15 telephone and 20 in-person interviews ($n = 35$). As table 1 shows, 27 of those interviews were with editors (10 men; 17 women). The editors are labeled with pseudonyms to protect their identity. The remaining eight interviews were with journalists and used to make initial observations in order to conduct the focus groups. Interviews were recorded using an audio recorder and lasted an average of 38 minutes.

The interviews comprised of questions relating to the newsroom environment and covered topics such as personal safety, journalistic routines, and observations on gender equality in the Kenyan news industry. All editors participating via in-depth interviews were asked if they had experienced sexual harassment on the job.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Focus Groups

The focus groups for this study targeted journalists and were conducted in Nairobi, Kenya in December 2019. The researchers conducted three focus group sessions consisting of 5, 7, and 8 women ($n = 20$). The journalists had various amounts of experience ranging from 2-15 years, were ages ranging from early 20s to mid 50s, were all university educated, and worked at the major media houses in Kenya. The researchers arranged the focus groups to match the experience and age of participants. The researchers moderated the group discussions and steered conversations towards topics of relevance to the study (Krueger, 1998). The same questions were asked for the focus groups as the in-depth interviews. The

group discussions lasted an average of 93 minutes. All group discussions were audiotaped. Focus groups were utilized during the in-person research project as a way to encourage discussion of what can be difficult topics, and to understand any strong affinities between participants (Cyr, 2016).

Due to the sensitivity of the topics discussed, the researchers evaluated that in order to reduce risk of harm and possible breaches of confidentiality (Sim & Waterfield, 2019), it was appropriate to limit focus groups to women only, instead of mixed groups with men and women. The researchers attempted to include more men journalists in this study to facilitate men-only focus groups but there was a lack of recruitment. It was thus decided to focus on women journalists and editors of any gender to understand the disparity between women's experiences and editors' perceptions of what is happening in newsrooms.

Thematic Analysis

Once interviews and focus groups were complete, the second researcher transcribed them. After initial discussion of the data, a thematic analysis was conducted that involved developing codes around the central themes of the data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). This mostly concentrated on answering the research questions that focused on gendered journalistic norms, sexual harassment, and exclusive socialization of men. The researchers followed Cartwright's (2020) four basic stages of immersing into the data, developing initial codes, combining and linking codes into themes, and reviewing the themes. Both researchers reviewed the data and identified emerging codes. After discussions, the first researcher took the lead to develop the themes. The second researcher then independently reviewed the themes and gave feedback. After further discussion, final revisions were made to the themes.

Findings

Gendered Journalistic Norms are Ubiquitous in News Organizations

RQ1a sought to understand to what extent participants considered their working environment to consist of gendered journalistic norms. There was complete agreement by all participants that women and men have different routines in newsrooms and are both pushed into and expected to behave by gendered journalistic norms, which demonstrates a complacency of organizations to continue ongoing sexist perceptions in journalism (Steiner, 2012).

Upholding Patriarchal Hierarchies

A core feature of gender systems is upholding patriarchal hierarchies (Heise et al. 2019), which all participants acknowledged was a central issue in newsrooms for reinforcing gendered journalistic norms. Men and women are consistently ranked differently based on their gender, even when it's not explicitly acknowledged. For example, division between the more prestigious routines such as men being mostly assigned to hard news beats such as politics, and women to the less prestigious soft news beats such as lifestyle. Gender ranking also occurs in management where the mid to senior roles are consistently men. Women are entering the news industry similarly to men, but only rising to lower-mid level positions (WIN, 2021).

Most of the men editors put the responsibility on the individual women for change. Four stated that women are shy and lack assertiveness to rise to the top. Two stated women have shorter careers in news and leave for PR or NGO jobs. Nathan related an incident where the CEO of his organization was asked at a meeting why there aren't more women in senior positions: "The CEO said it is not deliberate. Sometimes we recruit based on qualifications. That is what has happened here." Even though almost all senior positions have been

exclusively men, the CEO went on to state, “But he was very clear that these positions must be earned not because of gender. They must be earned, not handed out just because one is a woman.”

The women editors and focus group participants agreed that more women in senior positions would not only be a major step towards gender equality, but it would also help reduce other inequalities such as toxic workplace environments, story assignments, story placements, and pay gaps. Furthermore, it could reduce the consistent sexism experienced in a patriarchal atmosphere. Patricia summarizes the perceptions of women in the news industry regardless of their seniority: “They look at you first as a woman and then as a newsmaker. It implies you only made it into the news just because you are a woman, which is not right.”

One of the few women political reporters turned editor, Miriam describes her experiences:

It’s a male dominated world and you have to fight your way up to fit in. In every newsroom, they consider women to do features, education, and other soft stories.

So, when you want to do something a bit tough you have to really fight.

The Double Bind of Newsrooms

Interestingly, while two women editors agreed that women are too timid in the newsroom, the remaining women participants pointed out a cultural expectation for women to be passive, “They will tell you as a woman, you are not supposed to be assertive. You are not supposed to take men head on. A woman is not supposed to be heard; she is supposed to be seen” (Leah). A focus group participant explained, “We have a constant struggle between being aggressive and not trying to appear like you're being pushy.” This is often described as a gender double bind for women in public positions. A gender double bind describes how if women act according to what is understood as traditionally feminine, they risk being

perceived as incompetent and/or passive, but if women act with authority, they can quickly be positioned as overbearing or worse (Anderson, 2017). The women participants discussed their frustrations of women in newsrooms being pigeonholed as either of the sexist labels. Women being passive was the reason (mostly) men editors gave to excuse denying women equal opportunities, while simultaneously describing the women who have advanced as aggressive. It was a lose-lose situation.

Overall, both the editors and the journalists agreed that newsrooms consist of gendered journalistic norms, and that this is consistent across the news industry since media are so concentrated in Kenya (Obuya, 2012; Obuya & Ong'ondo, 2019; Simiyu, 2014). However, editors had a propensity to sidestep the organization's culpability by putting the responsibility on the individual to break the proverbial glass ceiling. The dominant attitude remains amongst those with more power in the organization that the individual must fight to overcome the roadblocks instituted by the organization.

Sexual Harassment is Pervasive

RQ1b focused on participant's experiences of sexual harassment in the newsroom in order to address a common feature of gender inequality in workplaces (Roscigno, 2019; Willness et al., 2007). When asked, all participants answered they had either experienced some form of sexual harassment or witnessed it. Examples of quid pro quo and hostile environment sexual harassment were provided. Participants agreed that younger staff were at more risk, but that sexual harassment happens at any time to women.

Participants noted that sexual harassment disproportionately affects women, but that men can also experience it. The participants also noted that most perpetrators were men. The men editors reported that they had not experienced sexual harassment personally, but had

witnessed sexual harassment—almost exclusively toward women. All but two women participants stated they had experienced sexual harassment.

Hostile Environment

Most participants experienced hostile environment sexual harassment. All focus group participants answered that they had experienced sexual harassment at work, often multiple times. Many could not recall the number of times they had been sexually harassed because sexual harassment occurred so often. The focus group participants shared many personal experiences of both verbal and physical sexual harassment. Sexual harassment ranged from inappropriate touching, such as prolonged hugs or butt slapping, to sexual assault and attempted rape.

Similarly, all but two women editors had experienced some form of sexual harassment in the newsroom. Their experiences included verbal harassment, unwanted physical contact such as shoulder rubs, hair touching, or prolonged hugs, pressure to date or perform sexual acts, and attempted rape. Regardless of their position in the newsroom, most of the women had experienced sexual harassment and stated they were likely to continue to experience sexual harassment.

Besides their personal experiences, the women participants described an atmosphere in the news industry that normalizes sexual harassment. All women participants stated they have been sexually harassed via text messages by men staff members, that they had witnessed men watching porn in the newsroom, that they were targets of public verbal sexual harassment in meetings, and that they feared being sexually harassed by news sources (particularly politicians).

Quid Pro Quo

Another form of sexual harassment named by participants was *quid pro quo*, which occurs when someone in a position of power demands sexual favors in exchange for work-related benefits. Most commonly, seven of the men editors reported they knew men in senior positions who threatened to withhold publishing stories written by women unless they performed sexual acts with them. It was widely understood by all participants that junior women staff, especially interns, were under threat for *quid pro quo* exploitation since publishing articles, securing a job or promotion, etc. is competitive in newsrooms.

The most extreme case of *quid pro quo* was that of one focus group participant who stated that when she met a politician about possible job opportunities, he told her he would give her a job if she had sex with him. When she attempted to leave, his bodyguards pursued her and sexually assaulted her on the street. A police officer saw the incident and intervened, but no charges were made.

Lack of Organizational Accountability

Despite sexual harassment being so common, there was little to no accountability for perpetrators. All women editors stated this was a common problem in the newsroom, and that perpetrators commit these acts repeatedly—usually with little to no consequences. Only two had reported their own experiences to HR. More commonly, the women editors stated that as they advanced in their organizations, they tried to stand up for themselves: “Unfortunately, I never reported but I told the people off. Whoever would make such comments I would tell them off” (Ashley). Previous research shows it’s common for women to be more verbal about their experienced sexual harassment as they advance in their careers (McLaughlin, 2012).

Similarly, there was a lack of reporting with focus group participants, with only three stating they had reported their experiences to HR. The three who had reported described an

overall negative experience, and that they were likely not to report again. One participant described how she reported a colleague after continued sexual harassment and stalking:

So, an investigation was done, and it became like the metoo movement. Women came out and they were saying he had done the same to them. After that, he was suspended. It was also an eye opener for me because when I reported him, and it was all over the place... Men were coming to me and telling me that this guy was supposed to get a promotion and now I've messed it up. I'm like, I have messed it up?

Interviewing both editors and news personnel showed disparity by gender and rank in terms of perceptions of how sexual harassment is addressed. All participants stated sexual harassment is very common in Kenyan newsrooms. However, the editors showed more confidence in their organization than the non-editors. This is common in the organizational level of analysis where it is expected for management to enforce a positive image of their news organization (Gade & Perry, 2003; Hansen et al., 1998). Despite policy changes in some news organizations, the focus group participants had very little confidence in their organizations. There is very low reporting in comparison to how often sexual harassment is experienced.

The Queen Bee Phenomenon

Even though men were identified as the primary perpetrators of sexual harassment, it is worthy to note that four women participants described being bullied by women in senior positions. The bullying of junior women by women included name-calling, a lack of support, and overly negative feedback on their work. The phenomenon of the minority of women in senior positions traditionally dominated by men reinforcing gendered inequalities at work by targeting junior women staff is called the "queen bee phenomenon" (Derks et al., 2016; Derks

et al., 2011a). Previous literature describes senior women distancing themselves from junior women to assimilate in spaces dominated by men (Derks et al., 2016), which is more common for women who have lower gender identification (Derks et al., 2011b). The women for this study had a mix of descriptions for senior women with some having “queen bee” characteristics and others being supportive.

The Necessity of the Boys’ Club in Gendered Systems

RQ1c asked about exclusive socialization of men in the news industry to address how gender systems are maintained through social interactions (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020). All participants were aware and emphasized the importance of socialization in the Kenyan news industry. Notably, while all women participants regardless of rank referred to this socialization as centred on a boys’ club, only one of the men editors was comfortable with the moniker. As John stated, “We call it networking—getting outside the newsroom and socializing is mandatory for anyone who wants to go up the ladder.” Indeed, the men may have rejected the idea of a boys’ club but stressed that socialization simultaneously consists of social activities such as eating, drinking, golfing, and discussing/negotiating job related matters. Newton explains, “It’s usually something people do as they discuss stories, sources and all manner of things that I think are useful to anybody who is interested in the profession.” Other job-related talk regularly occurring during socialization mentioned by the men editors included promotions, job vacancies, fellowships, scoops, story angles, workplace social dynamics, mentoring, and workloads. Most of this socialization takes place in the evening or weekends.

All women participants, regardless of their title, described being mostly excluded from the boys’ club for various personal, cultural, and professional justifications. What was

apparently invisible social privileging for the men editors, as found in other news media systems (Djerf-Pierre, 2007; North, 2009a), was further compounded in the rare situations where women do engage. Juanita confirmed that some women do socialize with men outside of work, but it's not very advantageous, "Because even when you socialize with them. they don't talk to you about work, or about what you do... I feel the boys' club is just for boys. Even if you go, they will save the real talk for later."

Other women editors described similar experiences and added that another limitation placed on women is their character being judged (another example of a gender double bind) if they appear to be socializing. Leah explains:

I worry about my reputation. Even if your boss attempts to go for lunch with you—something I try to avoid completely—everyone will start saying that you are sleeping together even if it was a genuine lunch with no ill intentions. Especially if you just go alone. But if two men go to lunch together that is absolutely fine.

Along with the gendered limitations that prevent women from significantly taking part in socialization, it was also clear to the women editors that creating an alternative space for socialization wouldn't be possible or ever carry the same power as a boys' club because there aren't enough women or non-participating men in the newsroom and in managerial positions to facilitate anything similar. Rosa described the experiences of one of the few women managing editors in the country: "She feels lonely...and you'll find that as much as she's there, her voice is not heard because decisions are made in the club or in the golf course, and she's not there."

Focus group participants were also unanimous that boys' clubs exist. They recounted similar experiences of feeling excluded and collectively discussed how they felt their

personal needs were overlooked at their organizations. Interestingly, younger participants observed that boys' clubs were more common with experienced and senior level positions, "You see younger people tend to gravitate towards each other to share our struggles..."

Socialization as Power in the Workplace

Socialization, which is perpetuated by and maintained almost exclusively by men, limits women's status in the news industry (Lobo et al., 2017; Ross, 2001). It not only builds better relationships for men, which can lead to higher trust and consequently benefits such as promotions, better story assignments, increased pay, and so forth, it also excludes women from external relationships with powerful actors. Part of mapping influences is to understand external forces on the news selection process as illustrated by the social institutional and social system levels (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Individuals (primarily men) benefit from informal organizational structures based on gendered journalistic norms in the social system, which in turn impact routines (story assignment, beat assignment, source use), organizational status (relationships with colleagues, promotions, mentoring), and social institutional influences (relationships with sources and powerful actors)."

Discussion

This study utilized in-depth interviews of news editors ($n = 27$) and journalists ($n = 8$), and focus groups of journalists ($n = 20$) in Kenya to understand to what extent gendered inequalities that impact journalism can be linked to the organizational level of analysis as identified by the levels of gatekeeping and the hierarchy of influences model. By focusing on one country, this study was able to demonstrate how various forms of gendered inequalities that discriminate against women are interconnected and linked to news organizations' failure to enforce more equitable working environments. These patterns may be enacted differently

according to geographical context, but as suggested by Reese (2007) and Reese & Shoemaker (2016), the levels of analysis help researchers identify generalizations across contexts.

Gendered inequalities exist in most news industries. There are also intersecting factors that further inequalities. In Kenyan newsrooms, participants identified sexist societal norms that are common in many places, but perhaps not always so overtly embraced within professional settings, along with continued economic and political pressures (Kareithi, 2013) that organizations use as excuses to prevent eliminating gendered inequalities. By revealing that the social institutional and social system levels are heavily sexist in Kenya and that they influence news organizations, our study gives insight into why perhaps gendered inequalities persist in newsrooms despite initiatives such as promoting a few women to senior positions.

More broadly, this study adds to current research that addresses the impact of gender at the individual and routine levels (Hanitzsch & Hanusch, 2012; Rodgers & Thorson, 2003) by positioning the enforcer of these gendered inequalities as the news organization. News organizations often reinforce patriarchal hierarchies rather than challenge them because it advantages those with power in the organization who are mostly men and who benefit from patriarchy, even if they are not aware of it (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020; Heise et al., 2019). Promotions, protection from harassing behaviors, the boys' club, elite assignments, higher salaries, social networks, etc. were all listed by participants as benefits of patriarchy. Other examples noted by participants such as watching porn in the office or harassment by politicians may not be universal; however, organizations maintaining the status quo over change is common and a driving force that prevents gender equality (also referred to as equity or justice) in news industries across most contexts.

This study updates previous literature to illustrate that gendered newsrooms persist. The participants were in collective agreement that news organizations are gendered, and this has many consequences, including gendered journalistic norms. The participants also agreed news organizational structures must change to include more women in senior positions. To avoid the queen bee phenomenon (Derks et al. 2011a; 2016) as described by some, news organizations must aim for gender parity in senior positions, rather than promoting a few women. Likewise, the responsibility should be on all stakeholders and not just women, particularly since those with the most power in the hierarchy remain men.

There was a glaring difference between editors and journalists, as well as men and women, in understanding who is responsible for changing the current system perpetuated across the Kenyan news media landscape and within most news media systems. Editors, particularly the men editors, placed the responsibility of change on the individual. This shows how the paradox continues—those with power to enact change are also those tasked with maintaining the status quo within their organization (Gade & Perry, 2003). Moreover, no matter the intentions of the individual, the hierarchy of the organizational, social institutional, and social system levels overpower individual initiatives, especially in the long-term. The organizational level should shield against negative macro forces such as gendered cultural norms and sexist forces such as politicians as much as possible. Boundaries on individuals and routines that promote healthy work environments are other organizational-level changes. The propensity to overlook the role of the news organization in maintaining gender systems allows organizations to continue with the status quo without being challenged. Studies that highlight the importance of the individual and routines level often fail to connect that these levels are enacted through the organizational level that continues to

privilege men within a gender system—even for studies that show perceived journalistic autonomy is predicated upon gender and other intersecting characteristics (Irer, 2017c).

The findings also show the challenges of the individual overcoming the system's inequalities due to the gender double bind women face in professional spaces (Anderson, 2017). Women editors and journalists were aware that even when they attempted to individually challenge the various gendered barriers, they were often labelled as too aggressive or simply ignored due to their limited authority. Consequently, their efforts were consistently undermined by the news organization and news personnel. The findings in India were similar, where an increased number of women are entering the workplace, but face backlash from men wanting to maintain the status quo (Chadha, Steiner & Guha, 2017).

Limiting women's authority within their news organizations extended to the exclusive socialization of men via the so-called boys' club. Previous literature shows that in many countries, newsrooms socially consist of hierarchies of men (Djerf-Pierre, 2007; Lobo et al., 2017; North, 2009a; Vandenberghe et al., 2017). This study adds to this by detailing how several aspects of the job including promotion, networks, sources, scoops, organizational decisions, and so forth, are influenced by boys' clubs that actively exclude women. This extends research about how gendered hierarchies are maintained at the organizational level by illustrating the importance of gendered social structures formed outside professional spaces. A solution to exclusive socializing of men in organizations is to formalize these conversations within the organization, particularly via organizational procedures. Instead of waiting for social institutional and social systems to change, which is often unlikely, news organizations can lead by eliminating exclusionary socialization practices.

A notable discovery of how gendered inequalities are enacted in newsrooms, is the severity of sexual harassment. In this study, 43 of the 45 women participants had experienced sexual harassment while working in the news industry—most multiple times. When asked how often sexual harassment occurs, there was a consensus that it was common and many participants agreed news organizations were either complacent, or even complicit. This result is consistent with previous findings and shows a lack of improvement in this regard in the news industry (International Women’s Media Foundation, 2013; Harris et al., 2016).

Part of the importance of situating gendered inequalities within the organizational level is that organizations do have the ability to pressure employees to enact certain organizational behaviors (Willnat et al., 2019) and therefore they can extend this pressure in ways that eliminate gendered inequalities. For example, if sexual harassment is present in news organizations, it is a result or combination of

1. the organization failing to have accountability mechanisms in place,
2. the organization failing to create an atmosphere wherein staff feel safe to enact the accountability mechanisms, and
3. the abuser has power that exceeds the accountability mechanisms at the organization.

Therefore, organizations can improve the situation by not only implementing robust anti-sexual harassment policies, but also providing training, auditing policies, improving communication, and creating safer mechanisms for victims to report.

Limitations and Future Research

The advantage of looking at one country to carefully map the extent of gendered journalistic inequalities can also be a limitation since most countries would benefit from such

analysis. This study maps the interconnectedness of various gendered inequalities. Future research should include comparing and contrasting other countries to further the findings found in this study. Other methodologies can be used in this process such as surveys.

It is also a limitation to not focus on ethnicity since that plays a role in Kenyan society. The participants in this study did touch on ethnicity as Kenya comprises of approximately 42 tribes (“Ministry of East African,” 2019; Wasserman & Maweu, 2014). Future research including other countries should consider the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and gender. Even though men participants were asked about their experiences in the news industry, particularly regarding sexual harassment, their reservation shows the need to separately research this area with the explicit purpose to target men participants. Also, some participants focused on sexuality and the status of LGBTQIA+ people in Kenya, which needs to be further developed. Another consideration would be to extend research beyond the media capitals of countries to other regions.

Conclusion

This study focused on how gendered journalistic norms, sexual harassment, and exclusive socialization of men operate within a gender system in the news industry that produces several serious consequences that will not be eliminated until news organizations act. Although the consequences of a gendered newsroom may manifest at the individual and routines level, they cannot be eliminated at the individual or routines level alone. Moreover, this study posits that the “organizational socialization” (Shoemaker, 1991, p. 59) within newsrooms furthers gendered inequalities through a systematic failure to change the status quo. External forces on the social institutional (i.e. politicians, powerful actors, and male-dominated public institutions) and social system (i.e. heteronormativity, patriarchy, and

sexism) levels influence the organizational level. In summary, this study makes an important contribution by mapping the interconnected and layered gendered inequalities that exist on all levels of influence but are ultimately determined and instituted by the organization.

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Table 1*In-Depth Interview Participants*

No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Job Title	Medium
1	Angela	Woman	Features Editor	Print
2	Anita	Woman	Magazine Editor	Print
3	Ashley	Woman	Special Editor	Print
4	Cindy	Woman	Managing Editor	Print
5	Joyce	Woman	News Editor	Print
6	Juanita	Woman	Magazine Editor	Print
7	Karen	Woman	Chief Sub-Editor	Print
8	Katrina	Woman	Magazine Editor	Print
9	Leah	Woman	Deputy News Editor	Print
10	Lucy	Woman	Assignments Editor	Print
11	Margaret	Woman	News Editor	Digital
12	Miriam	Woman	Assistant News Editor	Print
13	Patricia	Woman	Producer	TV
14	Rosa	Woman	Digital Editor	TV
15	Susan	Woman	Science Editor	Print
16	Violet	Woman	News Editor	TV
17	Wendy	Woman	News Editor	TV and Radio
18	Christopher	Man	News Editor	Print
19	Donald	Man	Busines Editor	Digital
20	Francis	Man	Producer	TV
21	John	Man	Investigations Editor	TV
22	Ken	Man	Business Editor	Print
23	Nathan	Man	Production Editor	Print
24	Newton	Man	Production Editor	Print
25	Peter	Man	Managing Editor	TV
26	Robert	Man	News Editor	Print
27	Thomas	Man	Associate Editor	Print

