

Thank You, Mr. President: Journalist Gender in Presidential News Conferences

LINDSEY MEEKS¹
University of Oklahoma, USA

Many factors can influence journalists and the news. This study focuses on the influence of a journalist's gender in the White House press corps by examining presidential news conferences and comparing what issues male and female journalists cover in their questions across eight administrations, from Richard Nixon to Barack Obama. This content analysis revealed three notable trends. First, women did not get called upon more often for questions over the course of the eight administrations. Second, in the aggregate, men and women were similar in their issue emphases. Third, when an additional influence was taken into account—the administration's party affiliation—men and women journalists shifted their issue emphases.

Keywords: White House press corps, journalist gender, political issues, presidential news conferences, extramedia influence

Helen Thomas was the first woman to join the ranks of the White House press corps (WHPC) and covered over half a century of presidents, from John F. Kennedy to Barack Obama. Thomas made her mark from the very beginning. In 1962, Thomas prompted President Kennedy to boycott the White House Correspondents' Association dinner until women journalists could attend (Neuman, 2013). The association capitulated and women journalists were henceforth able to attend.² More than 50 years later, there was another historic first for women journalists: On December 19, 2014, President Obama only called upon women journalists in his news conference. By all accounts, no president until Obama exclusively called on women in a White House news conference.³ It took more than 50 years for women journalists to go from not being in the room to momentarily owning the room in a presidential conference.

Lindsey Meeks: lmeeks@ou.edu

Date submitted: 2016–10–07

¹ This project was funded by the vice president for research of the University of Oklahoma.

² Notably, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt also played a pivotal role for women journalists because she held women-only press conferences to encourage newspapers to retain women journalists, which helped to eventually establish women as part of the WHPC (National First Ladies' Library, 2017).

³ Obama did not hold another women-only conference during the rest of this study's time frame.

This study assesses the historical impact of gender in the WHPC by examining presidential news conferences and comparing what issues men and women journalists cover in their questions across eight administrations, from Richard Nixon to Obama. Research has found differences between men and women journalists in their news coverage (e.g., Armstrong, 2004; Meeks, 2013). However, little research examines the influence of a journalist's gender in presidential conferences. One exception is a study by Clayman, Elliott, Heritage, and Beckett (2012), spanning 1953 to 2000, which found that, on average, women journalists were consistently and significantly more assertive and adversarial than men. Clayman et al.'s (2012) study suggests that a journalist's gender may be a factor in presidential conferences. Whether women emphasize different issues than men has not been thoroughly addressed by scholarship. This study fills that void by exploring the potential influence of a journalist's gender, as well as other mitigating factors, including the masculinization of news norms and extramedia influences, and examines how gender plays a role for this group of journalists in their coverage of the president.

The White House Press Corps

Before delving into gender, it is important to first understand the WHPC as an entity and as an important site of study. The following norms and traditions were in place as of the Obama administration. There are more than 2,000 members of the White House Correspondents' Association (WHCA), an organization of journalists who cover the White House and the president and who handle the accreditation process. Of that pool of journalists, only a select few make up the WHPC. As of 2016, there were 49 seats in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room for the WHPC. The executive board of the WHCA, not the White House Press Office, decides which news outlet gets a seat. Journalists without a seat, which can range from 30 to 60 additional journalists on any given day, stand around the perimeter (Quinn, 2009). The WHPC has access to daily briefings by the press secretary as well as presidential news conferences, and it often travels with the president. The composition of the WHPC includes well-established outlets—for example, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, CBS, ABC, NBC—with occasional makeovers to reflect changes in the media landscape. For example, in 2015 the WHPC introduced a seat for exclusively online entities such as *BuzzFeed* and *Yahoo News*.

The WHCA decides which outlets get seats, and the outlets choose which journalists fill the seats. Usually a news organization will assign a journalist who covered the winning presidential candidate on the campaign trail because this journalist will have developed contacts and insights while on the trail (Hess, 1992). Typically news outlets do not assign rookie reporters to cover highly viable candidates, which means journalists who enter the pipeline to the WHPC are more seasoned journalists. For example, Hess (1992) conducted a survey of WHPC members and found that most were White men, with an average age of 42, and they had been journalists for, on average, 19 years, with 13 years of experience as reporters in Washington, DC. The survey is dated, but given the historical context of this study, it sheds some light on WHPC members during part of this study's time frame.⁴

⁴ There is no updated survey of WHPC members, but an overview of the most called-upon journalists during Obama's second term found that the journalists were veterans, with over a decade of experience, and hailed from established media, such as the Associated Press and CBS. Based on this study's sample, Obama called on only two online-only publications, *Politico* and *Huffington Post*, across his second term.

Traditionally, the WHPC has been an important body to study for several reasons. First, the WHPC is tasked with holding the president accountable, and it often embraces this role. Clayman, Elliott, Heritage, and McDonald (2006) examined presidential conferences from 1953 to 2000, with a focus on the aggressiveness of journalists' questions. They found a "rise of a more vigorous and at times adversarial posture" (p. 561) in journalists' questions over time—including a rise in accountability questions, which ask the president to explain why they have adopted a policy or strategy. Second, the WHPC acts as a conduit between the president and the public, and thus fulfills the normative role of informing citizens and serving the public interest (Clayman et al., 2006). Third, the WHPC plays a key role in the agenda-setting process—the process by which salience is given to certain topics. The president can set the press agenda with an opening statement, but the WHPC can shift the agenda via its questions in the conference. These questions, and the president's responses, can set the press agenda, influence subsequent news coverage, and influence the public's agenda and information diet (Clayman et al., 2012). Contemporary media critics, however, have questioned the value of the WHPC, citing the increase in the public's distrust of the media and the president's ability to employ other channels to talk directly to the public, such as social media (Greenfield, 2017). More recently, critics have argued that President Donald Trump's contentious treatment of the news media may undermine the WHPC's normative value (Greenfield, 2017). For example, during a conference in early 2017, Trump refused to answer a CNN reporter, saying, "You are fake news" (Savransky, 2017, para. 4). For those who distrust the media and favor Trump, this exchange could strengthen their convictions. But for those who feel differently, catching Trump's real-time refusal on camera could highlight a president's potential weak spots on certain topics as well as a president's lack of accountability toward and transparency with the public. As David Folkenflik, National Public Radio's media critic, argued, "I think it's very important to be able to hear from our public leaders in ways that they can't entirely orchestrate, seeing them speak live and unscripted" (Greenfield, 2017, para. 20). Whether the president answers or avoids a question, these on-camera, extemporaneous exchanges are telling and inform the public of the president's strategies or weaknesses. Studying the WHPC over time enables scholars to track the ebb and flow of certain trends and assess what role the WHPC plays in society across multiple eras and presidencies.

Gender and News Beats

This study conceptually defines gender as socially constructed characteristics ascribed to women and men—norms, roles, and relationships—which determine what is expected, allowed, and valued of women and men in a given context (UN Women, 2017). Usually, these perceptions are heteronormative and include stylized, performative, and repeated acts that constitute what we as a society think it means to be a man or woman (Butler, 1988). Initially, individuals learn these norms via gender socialization as children, and these norms are reinforced throughout adulthood via familial behaviors, cultural values, educational institutions, organizational structures, and media content (Steiner, 2012). As members of a society, journalists experience culturally situated gender socialization long before they enter the profession.

These journalists were White men who had years of previous experience at more traditional outlets, such as *TIME* magazine.

Gender and gender socialization can act as individual-level factors that influence news. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) define individual-level influences as “factors that are intrinsic to the communication worker,” and individual communicators’ attitudes and beliefs may be the “result of their backgrounds or personal experiences” (p. 60). These factors can include, for example, gender, race, ethnicity, education, and sexual orientation. Rodgers and Thorson (2003) argue that men and women socialize into the workplace differently because they “bring different values, interests, and priorities to the newsroom that will affect the manner in which news stories are researched, framed, and written” (p. 659–660). This gender difference helped women gain a foothold in journalism. Women were originally brought into the newsroom to provide a “woman’s angle” (Correa & Harp, 2011; Everbach, 2006; Steiner, 2009). A woman’s angle and value in the newsroom was based on the separation of spheres regarding gender roles, and divisions of labor and authority attached to those roles. Traditionally, the private sphere was associated with women and femininity, and the perception that as society’s caretakers, women should handle domestic matters such as child care, health, education, and family, whereas the public sphere was associated with men and masculinity, and the perception that as society’s providers and protectors, men should handle public matters such as the economy, business, politics, and law (Ryle, 2011). In parallel fashion, journalist Zoe Heller noted, “Historically, the role of the female newspaper writer has been to leaven the serious (male) stuff . . . [with] news from the realm of the domestic, the emotional, the personal” (Chambers, Steiner, & Fleming, 2004, p. 36). Consequently, women and men journalists were tasked with covering news that aligned with these spheres, with news on the public sphere seen as “hard news” and worthy of more prestige (Chambers et al., 2004; van Zoonen, 1998). Gender socialization dictated women’s initial place in the newsroom.

Historical divisions have softened over time, but recent studies show gender differences in news beats that correspond with the male/public sphere and female/private sphere. The Women’s Media Center (2014) examined content from 20 of the most circulated/read/viewed news organizations in 2013 and found that men were more likely to cover political, criminal justice, and technology beats, and women were more likely to cover education, lifestyle, and health beats. Rodgers and Thorson (2003) examined newspapers and found that women were more likely than men to report on health-related, human-interest, and social issue stories. Cohen (2014) examined thousands of *New York Times* articles and found that women were the lead journalist on the majority of articles in 5 news sections: health, travel, home, dining, and fashion. Men were the lead journalist on a majority of articles in the other 16 sections, including, for example, business, world news, U.S. news, technology, and science. Furthermore, North (2016) examined survey responses from women journalists and found that women journalists reported being more likely to cover soft news; she concluded, “Hegemonically masculine newsroom culture underpinned women’s inequality in story allocations” (p. 356). These studies demonstrate that historical gender divisions still reverberate in modern newsrooms and a journalist’s gender can affect news practices.

Alternatively, other factors could dampen the effects of journalist gender. Journalists work within an occupational setting that has created standardized and recurring routines and norms that have become institutionalized and dictate what it means to be a news professional (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). This set of norms allows journalists to work and interact with a shared perception of the news-making process and can diminish individual-level influences. These norms, scholars argue, are decidedly male, with the professionalization of news operating on the same plane as the masculinization of the news (Correa &

Harp, 2011; Everbach, 2006; Steiner, 2009). Men have historically dominated newsrooms, and in turn, masculine culture has dominated journalism culture, including an emphasis on men over women sources, and masculine topics over feminine topics (Correa & Harp, 2011). This has created a professional environment in which the "masculine order is so deeply embedded in the newsroom culture that journalists, regardless of gender, embrace it as natural" (Correa & Harp, 2011, p. 302). Because this masculinization/professionalization is taught in journalism classes and reinforced in the workforce, Everbach (2006) asserted that women reporters become "indoctrinated to accept 'masculine' news values as professional standards" (p. 480). Scholarship has found that women journalists conform to masculinized/journalistic norms (e.g., Artwick, 2014; Everbach, 2006; Ross, 2007). The professionalization process women undergo in school and the newsroom may strip away the potential effects of their personal gender.

The impact of the professionalization may be especially acute for WHPC members. First, as previously mentioned, WHPC journalists are typically veteran reporters, which means they have long been exposed to and socialized toward professional norms. Second, WHPC members operate within a pack, which can homogenize coverage. *Pack journalism*, a term coined by Tim Crouse (1973), traditionally applies to a group of journalists assigned to follow a single candidate for a portion of the election. Skewes (2007), as well as Crouse (1973), claim that these conditions create a sameness of coverage: Campaign trail journalists "develop standards among themselves . . . and discuss both facts and story ideas as though their traveling companions are their newsroom away from home" (Skewes, 2007, p. 94). Because journalists who followed the winning candidate on the trail often become their outlet's WHPC member, they have been socialized to the standards of pack journalism even before they set foot in the briefing room. WHPC members are also part of another pack, the pack that fills the briefing room on a daily basis and often travels with the president. Instead of being inside the campaign bubble, WHPC members are in the presidential bubble. In sum, other factors may mitigate the effects of individual influences. To explore the impact of a journalist's gender, this study poses the following research question:

RQ1: Do women and men WHPC members emphasize different political issues in presidential conferences?

Moving beyond the aggregate, it is also important to examine gender differences in the context of time. Journalism has long been a boys' club. The WHPC, including its less formal beginnings, operated for over half a century before the first woman joined its ranks. In the decades that followed, the overall field of journalism witnessed an increase in the percentage of women reporters. In 1971, roughly a fifth of the journalistic workforce were women, and in the early 1980s, that figure rose to a third (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991). According to the American Society of News Editors (2016), that number crept up to 39.6% in 1991, and in 2015, 37.9% of reporters were women. This level of underrepresentation is exacerbated when we consider that most of the journalists covering politics are men. One study looking at electoral coverage between 1999 and 2008 examined articles with either all-male or all-female authors and found 84% of the articles were written by men (Meeks, 2013). Another report found that, among print journalists, men outnumbered women three to one in terms of reporting on the 2012 election (Bazelon, 2012). From their presence in the newsroom to their presence in bylines for political articles, women are the minority. Ideally, this study would track the number of women present at every presidential

conference and determine whether the proportion of women to men has varied over time. This measure of representation is not possible. First, there is no publicly available list of journalists present at every conference. Second, although there is some record of which journalists are assigned to the WHPC, there is no consistent, annual, official list of who is assigned. Furthermore, a list of who has a seat in the briefing room would not include the 30 to 60 journalists who attend the conference without a seat. There is no consistent way to determine the exact number of women present at each conference. To get an overview of women's presence in the WHPC, the next research question uses a proxy measure to assess presence. Over this study's time frame,

*RQ2: Is there an increase in the proportion of times women were called upon in presidential news conferences?*⁵

This conceptual section has focused thus far on one key player in a presidential conference: WHPC journalists. But to conclude this section, we will focus on another key player with considerable influence: the president. Per Shoemaker and Reese (1996), news coverage can be affected by extramedia factors, including news sources or government officials—roles the president simultaneously takes on during a conference. This dual role may explain why Shoemaker and Reese (1996) argue that "U.S. presidents are notoriously good at influencing what the news media cover" (p. 173). Wanta and Foote (1994) examined presidential influence by analyzing presidential statements and news coverage and found that for three of four issue categories, the actor with the most influence in the president–news relationship was the president (for the fourth issue, neither actor had greater influence). For example, Reagan was very successful in pushing an economic agenda by "relentlessly and consistently repeating a single theme across all presidential activities" (Wanta & Foote, 1994, p. 447).

Presidents' policy agendas, from campaign platforms to initiatives in office, are often influenced by their party affiliation. Democrats and Republicans have gradually cultivated an image that they "own" certain political issues. Issue ownership is based on public perceptions of each party being differentially better at handling certain issues, and these perceptions are based on a party's "history of attention, initiative, and innovation toward these problems" (Petrocik, 1996, p. 826). Petrocik's (1996) analysis of multiple national surveys and a recent Pew Research Center (2014) study find that Democrats are seen as better at handling education, health care, social welfare, and reproductive rights, and Republicans are perceived as more successful at handling foreign affairs, national security, crime, and economics. Presidential candidates foster this ownership by emphasizing their party's issues during campaigns (e.g., Petrocik, 1996; Petrocik, Benoit, & Hansen, 2003). Candidates have great incentive to do so because Hayes (2008) found that candidates receive more favorable coverage when the news focuses on issues their party owns than when it focuses on issues they do not own. Presidents looking to reinforce the public's positive issue ownership associations, uphold their party's mantle, and engender more positive coverage may emphasize owned issues while in office.

Journalists may also be influenced by a president's party-aligned agenda. If a journalist continuously pursues a line of questioning that does not fit the administration's agenda, he or she may get

⁵ Typically, journalists are called upon by the president, press secretary, or a moderator.

called on less. In an attempt to get more questions, and potentially appease their editors, journalists may emphasize different issues under different administrations based on party. Ultimately, the president's desire and ability to set the issue agenda, coupled with journalists' dependency on official sources, may dampen the influence of journalist gender. To examine whether there is an interaction between journalist gender and presidential party, I ask the following research question:

RQ3: How and to what extent does the administration's party affiliation affect men and women journalists' issue emphases?

Methods

To explore these research questions, a quantitative content analysis was conducted on presidential news conferences. A quantitative content analysis enables unobtrusive, systematic analysis of large amounts of communication, which allows researchers to track the volume and prevalence of variables (Krippendorff, 2004). This approach also enables researchers to detect patterns in and relationships between these variables across large data sets and time frames. With this methodological approach, this study can systematically examine the relationship of gender and issue emphasis across hundreds of conferences spanning more than 45 years. Presidential conferences were retrieved from the American Presidency Project (APP), an online repository of presidential documents. The APP houses unaltered documents provided by the White House, and the APP's archive of presidential conferences dates back to Herbert Hoover. This study's time frame ranges from the administrations of Richard Nixon to Barack Obama. Specifically, the population of conferences for this study stretches from Nixon's first news conference on January 27, 1969, to Obama's news conference on April 1, 2016. The start date was selected for logistical and conceptual reasons. First, Helen Thomas was the first woman member of the WHPC and joined during the Kennedy administration, yet, based on a review of the records, it was not until 1969 that the White House started to consistently identify journalists in conference transcripts. Given the intent of this study, regular identification of the journalist is crucial. Second, regarding RQ2, it is important to note that women became increasingly more present in U.S. newsrooms starting in the 1960s and 1970s, fueled by the women's movement and laws regarding affirmative action and equal opportunity employment (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991). This time frame captures the dynamic presence of women in journalism across eight administrations.

Presidents can hold solo or joint conferences. George H. W. Bush was the first president to regularly use joint conferences, and typically joint conferences include an international official and journalists with outlets from the official's home country.⁶ In turn, joint conferences often include international journalists who have not been socialized with U.S. gender or newsroom norms, or WHPC norms. Therefore, these journalists have not experienced the influences germane to this study. Thus, only solo conferences were included in the sample. During this study's time frame, there were 450 solo presidential conferences. A systematic random sample was pulled to ensure that conferences were captured across the time frame. About 30% of the

⁶ Per APP, from Nixon to Reagan, there was one joint conference, held by Ford in 1974. Alternately, H. W. Bush held 46 joint conferences during his term.

conferences were sampled, yielding a total of 151 conferences.⁷

The unit of analysis was a journalist's turn in asking a question. The president, press secretary, or moderator typically calls upon a journalist, and a journalist may ask one or multiple questions during her or his turn. For instance, in a 2009 news conference with Obama, Jennifer Loven of the Associated Press asked the president, "Given the problems that the financial bailout program has had so far . . . why do you think the public should sign on for another new, sweeping authority for the government to take over companies, essentially?" After the president's response, Loven followed up with, "Why should the public trust the government to handle that authority well?" These two questions represent a single journalist's turn in asking questions and thus form a single unit of analysis for this study. This example also demonstrates why this study did not examine the individual questions as the unit of analysis. Often, follow-up questions, without the context of the initial question, are difficult, if not impossible, to interpret. In the example above, without the initial question, there is no way of knowing what kind of "authority" Loven is referencing. Journalists may also cover multiple topics with multiple questions in their turn. For example, Mimi Hall of *USA Today* asked:

Thank you, Mr. President. Just to follow up on Libya, and I also have a budget question. You say you're concerned, but is Qadhafi staying, is that an acceptable option for you ever? And my question on the budget is: There's been some criticism from members of your own party about your leadership on negotiations on spending. And I'm wondering, given that, if you can talk about where you stand on a three-week CR [continuing resolution], on longer-term priorities, and what you would and would not accept on cuts.

Both of these questions occurred during a single turn, covered multiple topics, and counted as one unit of analysis. Across the 151 news conferences, there were a total of 2,588 turns.

A journalist's apparent gender was assessed via a multistep process. First, the first and last name and news outlet of each journalist as provided in the APP documents was recorded. For example, the document may include, "Carol Lee, Wall Street Journal," or "Ron Allen, NBC." The White House, not the APP, identifies journalists in transcripts. Second, the gender of the journalists was assigned based on gender-based naming conventions in the United States. For example, names such as Carol, Julie, and Margaret are commonly understood as women's names, and names such as Chuck, Jeff, and Ron are commonly understood as men's names, and were coded as such. Third, for gender-neutral/ambiguous names such as Chris and Terry, research was conducted using the journalist's name and news outlet to seek more information to determine their apparent gender. This identification approach has been used in other studies (see Meeks, 2013). Furthermore, journalists were often called upon with a gendered salutation, such as mister, which aided the coding process. When no name was provided or it was impossible to identify the journalist's gender, it was coded as *unknown*.

⁷ Number of solo conferences per administration: Nixon, 39; Ford, 39; Carter, 59; Reagan, 46; H. W. Bush, 91; Clinton, 62; W. Bush, 53; Obama, 61.

To track issue emphases, this study built on the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) codebook. CAP created a comprehensive codebook of policy areas to track historical trends in policy discussion across all three branches of government as well as news media, making it highly applicable for examining communication in presidential conferences. Much of this study's codebook aligns with the categories and dimensions of CAP's codebook, with one exception. CAP does not have a specific category for reproductive issues, thus a category to address these issues was created. The 20 categories included the following, with example dimensions in parentheses: agriculture (agricultural trade, subsidies for farmers/ranchers), banking/finance/commerce (regulation of financial institutions, mortgages), civil rights/minority issues/civil liberties (LGBT rights, freedom of speech), defense (national security, combating terrorism), education (student loans, testing standards), energy (renewable energy, pipeline development), environment (climate change, emissions), foreign trade (international trade negotiations, fast-track authority), government relations (president–Congress relations, government shutdown), health (health care reform, prescription costs), immigration (immigration reform, amnesty), international affairs (foreign policy, international sanctions), labor (unions, employee benefits), law/crime/family issues (criminal justice reform, domestic violence), macroeconomics (debt, taxes), reproductive issues (contraception, abortion), social welfare (Social Security, food stamps), space/science/technology/communications (NASA, FCC regulations), transportation (highway/bridge/railway construction or maintenance), and other issues (funds for presidential library, America's moral fabric).

The coding process was manual and iterative. Once the codebook was constructed, a pilot test was completed in which the codebook was applied to conferences outside of this study's sample, and revisions were made at the conclusion of the test. Next, two coders were trained, conducted a practice round of coding, and then independently applied the codebook to a random sample of journalists' turns. Calculated using Krippendorff's alpha, coefficients met appropriate acceptance levels (Krippendorff, 2004): civil rights/minority issues/civil liberties ($\alpha = .85$), defense ($\alpha = .86$), environment ($\alpha = .88$), foreign trade ($\alpha = .81$), government relations ($\alpha = .84$), international affairs ($\alpha = .90$), macroeconomics ($\alpha = .81$), other ($\alpha = 0.79$), and there were no disagreements for agriculture, banking/finance/commerce, education, energy, health, immigration, labor, law/crime/family issues, reproductive issues, social welfare, space/science/technology/communications, and transportation.

Results

Overall, men were called upon for 44.9% ($n = 1,163$) of the turns, women for 20.8% ($n = 538$), and 34.3% ($n = 887$) were unknown. These percentages yield two notable findings. First, men were called upon more often—more than twice as many times as women. Second, roughly a third of the journalists' gender was unidentifiable because the transcripts did not include the name of the journalist. Transcripts from Nixon to Reagan contributed the most to this lack of labeling, whereas labeling was much more evident in later administrations. If we narrow the data set to identifiable turns ($n = 1,701$), then men were called upon for 68.4% of the turns, and women were called upon for 31.6%.

For the rest of the analysis, the turns coded as unknown for journalist's gender are omitted, leaving a total of 1,701 turns. Regarding overall issue emphasis, Table 1 provides the percentages for each issue across all turns. The top five issues (in this order): international affairs (48.3%), defense (27.4%), government relations (26.6%), macroeconomics (22.7%), and law/crime/family (8.4%). Within

these top five, there is considerable disparity. The first-ranked issue of international affairs is discussed almost six times more than the fifth-ranked issue of law and more than twice as much as the fourth-ranked issue of macroeconomics. International affairs also has a double-digit lead over the second- and third-ranked issues of defense and government relations, respectively. Overall, journalists heavily emphasized international affairs.

The first research question focused on whether female and male WHPC members emphasized different political issues in presidential conferences. Table 1 provides the percentages for each issue by journalist gender. Of the 20 issue comparisons, one χ^2 test was significant and two were marginally significant. First, women (5.8%) were significantly more likely than men (3.5%) to emphasize civil rights/minority issues, $\chi^2(1, N = 1,701) = 4.540, p = .033$. Second, women (10.2%) emphasized law/crime/family issues more than men (7.6%), $\chi^2(1, N = 1,701) = 3.371, p = .066$. Third, women (3.7%) emphasized social welfare more than men (2.2%), $\chi^2(1, N = 1,701) = 3.070, p = .080$. In sum, regarding RQ1, women and men were similar in their issue emphasis on 17 issues, and women emphasized three issues more than men: civil rights/minority issues, law/crime/family issues, and social welfare.

Table 1. Percentage of Turns for Issues in General and by Journalist Gender.

Issue	Total (<i>N</i> = 1,701)	Women (<i>n</i> = 538)	Men (<i>n</i> = 1,163)
Agriculture	1.2	1.3	1.1
Banking/finance/commerce	2.5	3.2	2.2
Civil rights/minority issues	4.2	5.8	3.5
Defense	27.4	27.0	27.6
Education	1.2	1.3	1.1
Energy	3.6	3.5	3.7
Environment	1.6	1.5	1.6
Foreign trade	2.8	2.4	3.0
Government relations	26.6	28.6	25.6
Health	3.9	4.6	3.6
Immigration	1.9	2.0	1.8
International affairs	48.3	46.1	49.3
Labor	1.1	1.7	0.9
Law/crime/family issues	8.4	10.2	7.6
Macroeconomics	22.7	22.5	22.8
Other	8.3	9.5	7.7
Reproductive issues	1.3	1.9	1.0
Social welfare	2.7	3.7	2.2
Space/science/communication/technology	0.9	1.1	0.9
Transportation	1.1	0.9	1.1

The second research question asked whether there was an increase in the proportion of times

women were called upon over this study's time frame. The analysis focused on the proportion of women relative to men in terms of being called upon in a conference. Therefore, if a conference had four turns in which the gender of the journalist was known, and men were called upon three times and women were called upon once, the proportion would be men were called upon for 75% of the turns and women for 25% for that individual conference. To address RQ2, I ran a correlation between conference date and percentage of turns given to women. There was no correlation: $r = .037$, $p = .654$. Women were not called upon more often over time. I also plotted women's proportion of being called upon per conference in Figure 1. The solid line represents a linear trend line, with $R^2 = 0.00135$. The flatness of the trend line and the small R^2 result reinforce the correlation results.⁸

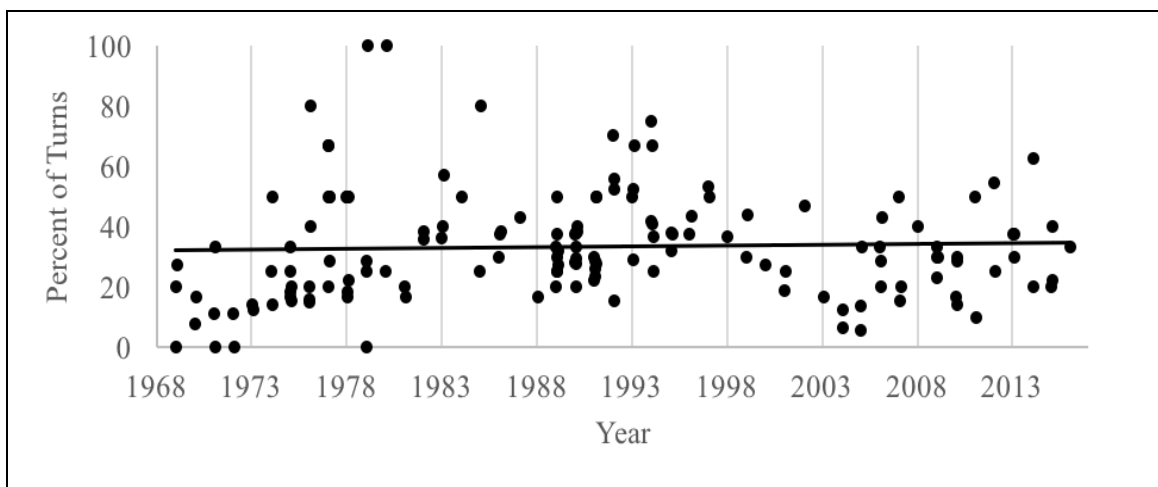


Figure 1. Percentage of turns given to women relative to men per conference.

The final research question explored whether the administration's political party affiliation affected men's and women's issue emphases. To assess this research question, I created a dummy variable and separated the eight administrations into two groups: *Republican administrations* included Nixon, Ford, Reagan, H. W. Bush, and W. Bush, and *Democratic administrations* included Carter, Clinton, and Obama. To examine the interaction between the administration's party and journalist gender across all the issues, I ran a multivariate general linear model. The model for this interaction was significant, $F(60, 5,007.07) = 3.093$, $p = .000$, Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.897$, partial $\eta^2 = .036$. There was a statistically significant interaction between the administration's party and the journalist's gender for seven issues and a marginally significant interaction for three issues. Issues were coded as absent (0) or present (1) for each journalist's turn; therefore, the highest mean score was 1.0. Graphs of the statistically significant

⁸ Figure 1 shows two instances in which women received 100% of the turns. There were multiple turns in both conferences where the journalist's gender was unknown. As noted earlier, the first time women received 100% of turns was in 2014. Presumably women did not receive all the turns in these earlier conferences.

interactions are presented in Figure 2. Note the y axis scale changes, and women are represented by a solid black line and men are represented by a dashed black line.

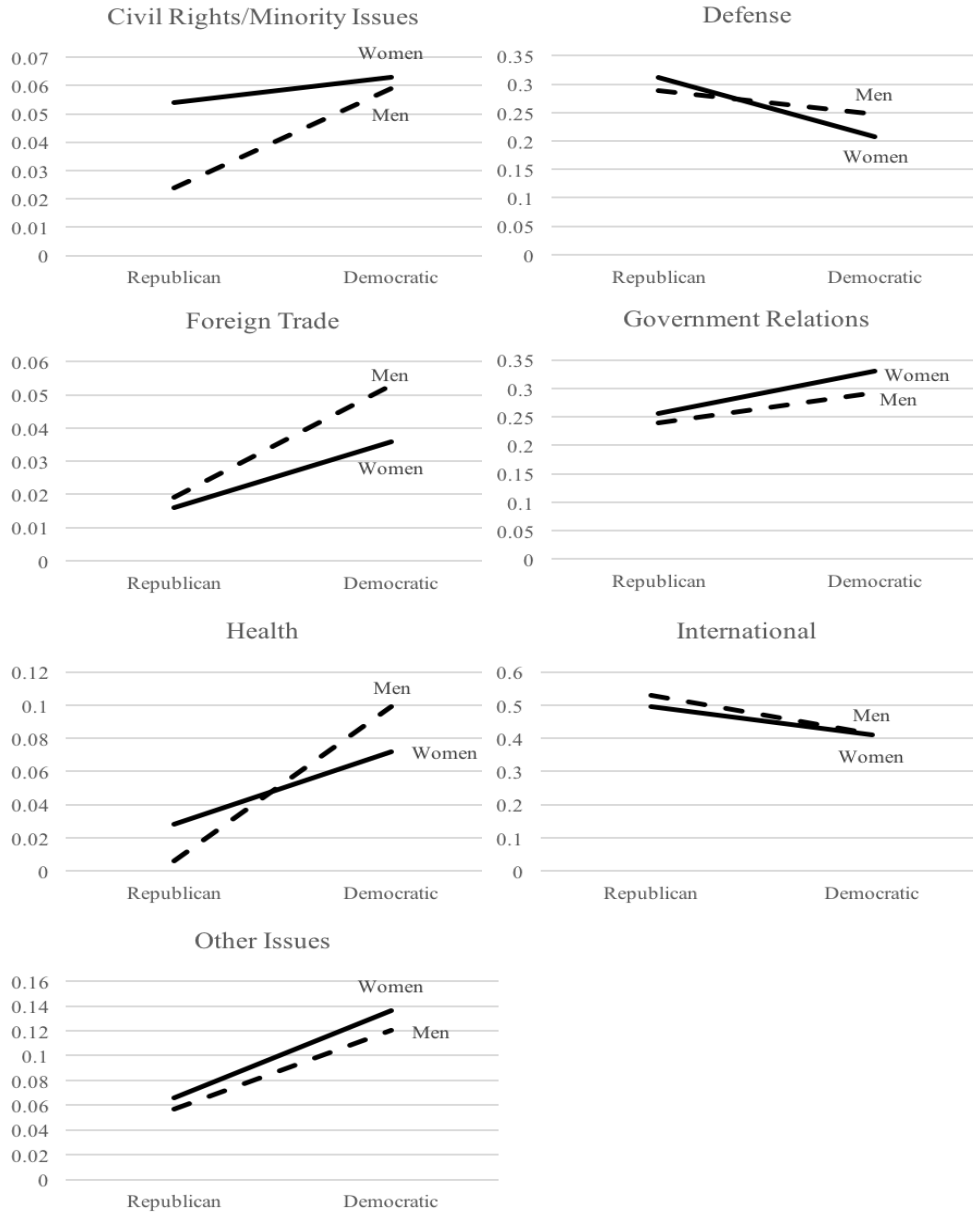


Figure 2. Interaction effects for journalist gender and administration's party affiliation.

Starting with the top-left graph, there is a significant interaction effect for civil rights/minority

issues, $F(3, 1,697) = 4.129$, $p = .006$, partial $\eta^2 = .007$. Under Democratic administrations, women and men increased their emphasis on civil rights. Next, results were significant for defense, $F(3, 1,697) = 3.131$, $p = .025$, partial $\eta^2 = .006$. Men and women decreased their emphasis on defense issues during Democratic administrations. For foreign trade, women and men increased their focus on foreign trade under Democratic administrations, $F(3, 1,697) = 4.476$, $p = .004$, partial $\eta^2 = .008$. The interaction effects for government relations were significant, and men and women emphasized this issue more in Democratic administrations, $F(3, 1,697) = 3.122$, $p = .0025$, partial $\eta^2 = .005$. For health, men and women increased their focus on this issue under Democratic administrations, $F(3, 1,697) = 22.454$, $p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .038$. For international affairs, men and women decreased their focus on this issue under Democratic administrations, $F(3, 1,697) = 6.416$, $p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .011$. For other issues, men and women increased their emphasis on this issue under Democratic administrations, $F(3, 1,697) = 7.740$, $p = .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .013$. In every case, women and men shifted their focus on an issue in a similar fashion based on the administration's party affiliation. In Democratic administrations, compared with Republican administrations, women and men *increased* their focus on civil rights, foreign trade, government relations, health, and other issues, and women and men *decreased* their emphasis on defense and international affairs.

The final set of interactions were marginally significant and are not graphed. First, for law/crime, under Democratic administrations, women slightly decreased their emphasis on this issue (Republican $M = .104$ vs. Democratic $M = .1$), whereas men increased their emphasis (Republican $M = .065$ vs. Democratic $M = .099$), $F(3, 1,697) = 2.407$, $p = .066$, partial $\eta^2 = .004$. Based on the provided means, women emphasized law more than men in Republican administrations, and women and men were virtually tied in their emphasis in Democratic administrations. Second, for macroeconomics, under Democratic administrations, women decreased their emphasis on this issue (Republican $M = .252$ vs. Democratic $M = .186$), whereas men increased their emphasis (Republican $M = .212$ vs. Democratic $M = .261$), $F(3, 1,697) = 2.294$, $p = .076$, partial $\eta^2 = .004$. Based on the provided means, women were more likely than men to emphasize macroeconomics under Republican administrations, and men were more likely than women to focus on this issue under Democratic administrations. Finally, for social welfare, men and women decreased their focus on this issue under Democratic administrations (Women: Republican $M = .047$ vs. Democratic $M = .023$; Men: Republican $M = .025$ vs. Democratic $M = .016$), $F(3, 1,697) = 2.317$, $p = .074$, partial $\eta^2 = .004$. This final interaction mimics the trend found in the statistically significant interactions discussed above: Men and women similarly shifted their issue focus based on the administration's party.

To determine whether a particular administration was driving these effects, I ran descriptive statistics to assess what percentage of turns dealt with each issue for each administration. The following discussion is not meant to be exhaustive; rather, the aim is to provide some historical context to the findings. For civil rights, the aforementioned interaction analysis showed an increase in this issue under Democratic presidents. Descriptive statistics showed that 2.6% to 3.7% of turns discussed this issue under a Republican administration, whereas the range for Democrats was 5.4% to 7.4%. Therefore, each Democratic administration received more turns on this issue than any of the Republican administrations. For defense, the interaction analysis showed a decrease in defense under Democratic administrations. The range for Republicans was 19.3% to 44.4%, with Ford (19.3%) and H. W. Bush (22.7%) making up the low end of the range and W. Bush (35.5%), Nixon (38.4%), and Reagan (44.4%) making up the higher end.

This distribution of turns could be attributed to the intensity and duration of U.S. involvement in various wars under different Republican administrations. For all of Nixon's presidency, the United States was deeply engaged in the Vietnam War, whereas Ford took over at the tail end of the war. The Cold War was long-ranging, but several climatic moments regarding escalation and easing of tensions happened under Reagan's watch. H. W. Bush served during the end of the Cold War and during the Gulf War, but most of the East–West tensions in the Cold War had subsided during his term and the Gulf War was a relatively short engagement. Finally, W. Bush's administration was consistently engaged in defense from very early on, starting with the September 11 attacks and continuing with the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Additionally, public opinion could have influenced journalists' varying emphasis on defense. If public opinion was sour on a war, journalists may have asked more questions in an attempt to serve the public interest. For example, during Nixon's presidency, public opinion of the Vietnam War turned negative, especially after footage aired of the Cam Ne attack, and while public support for the invasion of Iraq under W. Bush was initially positive, public attitudes started to decline once it was revealed that there was no evidence of weapons of mass destruction (Newport & Carroll, 2005). Democrats, of course, served during times of war, but their range for defense was 20% to 27.2%, which anchors them more toward the lower end of the Republicans' range.

For foreign trade, interaction analysis showed an increase in turns under Democrats. The range for Republicans was 0.9% to 3.7%, and for Democrats it was 3.5% to 5.4%. Clinton represents the highest emphasis of any administration on foreign trade, with 5.4%. This strong emphasis may be because, during his time in office, the North American Free Trade Agreement was passed, trade was opened up with China, and a large-scale protest against the World Trade Organization took place in Seattle in 1999. Regarding government relations, there was an increase under Democratic leadership. For Republicans, the range was 18.9% to 47.4%, though all the presidents except for Ford hovered in the 18.9% to 25.4% range, with Ford being an outlier at 47.4%. This issue category includes turns regarding presidential scandals, and many of Ford's turns dealt with the fallout of the Watergate scandal and the potential pardoning of Nixon. For Democrats, only 15.3% of Carter's turns focused on this issue, whereas Clinton had 32.1% and Obama had 35.8%. This high percentage for Obama may be because his term included multiple Supreme Court Justice appointees (and the death of Justice Scalia), increasing polarization that affected president–Congress relations, and his arguably controversial use of executive orders. For health, there was an increase under Democratic leadership. The range for Republicans was 0% to 1.8%, with neither Nixon nor Ford receiving a single turn on health. For Democrats, only 1.2% of turns on health were directed at Carter, but Clinton received 8.9% and Obama received 13%. The emphasis on health under Clinton can most likely be attributed to his failed attempt to provide universal health care and the bill he signed into law regarding the Children's Health Insurance Program. Under Obama, much of this focus can be attributed to the Affordable Care Act.

Emphasis on international affairs decreased under Democrats. The range for Republicans was 20.2% to 61.7%. With the exception of Ford, all the other Republicans' turns included 44.4% or more emphasis on this issue, with H. W. Bush receiving the most. For Democrats, the range was 38.8% to 44.4%, with Obama receiving the highest percentage. In turn, four of the five Republicans' turns equaled or outpaced the highest percentage for Democrats. All presidents engage in foreign policy, but Republicans collectively received more turns regarding this issue. It is possible that because so many

defense matters often have an international component—for example, whether the president will intervene in another country's affairs by military force or diplomacy—the aforementioned discussion of Republicans being at the helm during contentious or prolonged war efforts could contribute to Republicans receiving more international turns.

Discussion

Gender has played a role in various aspects of news, from the individual journalist's gender to the gendering of news beats. This study explores the role of a journalist's gender in presidential conferences and what issues men and women emphasize in this setting. This analysis produced three patterns. First, in the aggregate, men and women did not appear to substantially differ in their issue emphases. Across 20 issue comparisons, 17 were insignificant, suggesting that men and women emphasized these issues similarly. Furthermore, the top four most emphasized issues for men *and* women were the same: international affairs, defense, government relations, and macroeconomics. This finding can be interpreted in two ways. First, all four of these issues are considered hard/masculinized news. Therefore, men and women may have both aligned with the news norm of privileging hard news, suggesting the influence of professionalization. Second, given that this study also found that journalists' questions can be influenced by the president, it is possible that presidents focused more on these specific issues in their administrations and journalists followed suit by aligning their agenda with the president's agenda. A more holistic analysis of the president's opening statements and surrounding historical context is needed to better understand which interpretation best fits the data.

For the remaining issues, results revealed that women were more likely than men to emphasize civil rights/minority issues, law/crime/family issues, and social welfare. This collection of issues is notable because aspects of them lean toward women's news beats and the traditional label of "women's issues." For example, family issues and social welfare correspond with the traditional woman's angle on news based on the private sphere. Furthermore, civil rights/minority issues includes discussion of discrimination based on gender and fair/equal pay, both issues that typically affect women more than men. Thus, while women and men were similar on most issues, the areas where women were predominant correspond to some extent with women's traditional ownership of the private sphere and issues that disproportionately affect women.

Second, though the presence of women reporters in the United States increased during this study's time frame, women's proportion of turns in conferences did not. In 1971, women made up roughly a fifth of the journalistic workforce, and in 2015, they made up almost 38% (American Society of News Editors, 2016; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991). However, their share of turns in presidential conferences has remained relatively unchanged over the span of eight administrations. The trend line in Figure 1 puts women at just over 30% at the beginning of the study, and that is where they stay throughout the duration of the study. Because there is no publicly available head count of women and men journalists present at every presidential conference, it is impossible to say whether this 30% indicates that women were being called upon less than, greater than, or equal to their proportional representation in the briefing room. That said, women seem to have plateaued at just over 30%. Women cannot control the rate at which they get called upon; that control rests with the administration. On April 2, 2009, during a news

conference, Obama stated the following while calling on journalists: "But I also want to make sure that I'm not showing gender bias. So this young lady right here; not you, sir." In this conference, 10 journalists were called upon—three were women, and the rest were men. Therefore, even when gender bias is top of mind for the president, women still only manage to get called upon about 30% of the time.

Third, once the administration's party affiliation was taken into account, there were few differences between men and women. For all seven of the statistically significant interactions and for one of the three marginally significant interactions, men and women simultaneously shifted their issue emphases when questioning a Republican versus Democratic president. Men and women placed more emphasis on the following issues during Democratic leadership: civil rights/minority issues, foreign trade, government relations, health, and other issues. Men and women placed more focus on the following issues under Republican leadership: defense, international affairs, and social welfare. The extramedia influence of the administration's party seemed to play a bigger role than the influence of a journalist's gender. Of the seven significant interactions, five of these issues are owned by political parties—government relations and other issues are not owned by either party. Of these five, four of the issues, and their emphasis, corresponded with party ownership. For example, civil rights/minority issues and health are owned by Democrats, and journalists emphasized these issues more under a Democratic presidency. Defense and international affairs are owned by Republicans, and journalists emphasized these issues more during a Republican presidency. The only issue that did not follow party ownership literature is foreign trade. Typically, foreign trade can be considered a Republican issue, but journalists emphasized this issue more under Democratic leadership. As discussed in the results section, Bill Clinton surpassed any president, Republican or Democrat, on this issue in the sample. The break with ownership and the heavy emphasis during the Clinton administration may be because several notable trade deals and the World Trade Organization protest occurred during his presidency. In this case, punctuated moments in history may have altered the usual alignment with party ownership. Overall, while men and women differed on two marginally significant interactions for law/crime and macroeconomics, the majority of the significant interactions suggest the administration's party may be more influential in setting the president–press agenda than a journalist's gender.

This study has some limitations. First, there are many factors that influence journalists, news, and presidential conferences that were not included in this study. For example, Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) hierarchical model includes other areas of influence that were not examined in this study, including organizational and ideological influences. Additional work is needed to better understand the role of these influences in WHPC presidential news conferences and how they may intersect with a journalist's gender, professional norms, and presidential party affiliation.

Second, the gender for a third of the turns could not be identified. Transcripts from the first four administrations in this time frame contributed the most to the prevalence of unknown journalists because the transcripts did not always label the journalists asking the question. An extra step was taken to remedy this issue. Online video archives of presidential conferences from C-SPAN and the Associated Press were reviewed in an attempt to identify the unknown journalists. In some cases, the videos included a chyron identifying the name and news affiliation of the journalist. This extra step yielded mild success; many journalists remained unidentified due to a lack of chyrans or camera angles that did not cut away to

individual journalists when they asked questions. Better identification of more journalists would have created a more comprehensive data set. This limitation is hard to overcome because working with historical archives can often mean data sets are incomplete or flawed. However, working within these limitations is often necessary to uncover historical patterns. This study worked within these parameters to offer insight into an area of study that has been relatively under examined.

Finally, the coding for issue emphases focused on broad issue categories, and this approach may have obscured some more nuanced findings. For example, women and men may emphasize law/crime similarly, but their questions may feature different issue dimensions. Women may focus more on gun control, whereas men may focus more on drug trafficking. Future work is needed to understand whether women and men emphasize different issue dimensions.

Ultimately, a journalist's gender did not appear to make a significant impact on most of the issue emphases in this context. In the aggregate, women and men emphasized issues similarly across the majority of this study's issues, and men and women's turns focused on the same top four issues. Furthermore, additional analysis revealed that men and women responded similarly in terms of issue emphasis based on the president's party. In other words, women and men mutually focused on certain issues under Democrats and on other issues under Republicans. These variances in issue emphasis often corresponded with political party ownership. Collectively, these findings suggest that the individual-level influence of gender is not a particularly dominant factor in setting the president–press agenda. Rather, the results suggest that other factors, such as professionalization, extramedia influences, and political ownerships, play a potentially more powerful role in shaping WHPC members' agendas.

References

- American Society of News Editors. (2016). *Employment of men and women*. Retrieved from <http://asne.org/content.asp?contentid=144>
- Armstrong, C. (2004). The influence of reporter gender on source selection in newspaper stories. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81(1), 139–154. doi:10.1177/107769900408100110
- Artwick, C. (2014). News sourcing and gender on Twitter. *Journalism*, 15(8), 1111–1127. doi:10.1177/1464884913505030
- Bazelon, E. (2012, August 28). Male journalists may dominate campaign coverage, but look what women write about. *Slate*. Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2012/08/28/female_political_journalists_fewer_bylines_but_writing_on_theImportant_stuff_.html
- Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), 519–531. doi:10.2307/3207893
- Chambers, D., Steiner, L., & Fleming, C. (2004). *Women and journalism*. London, UK: Routledge.

- Clayman, S., Elliott, M., Heritage, J., & Beckett, M. (2012). The president's questioners: Consequential attributes of the White House press corps. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 17(1), 100–121. doi:10.1177/1940161211420867
- Clayman, S., Elliott, M., Heritage, J., & McDonald, L. (2006). Historical trends in questioning presidents, 1953–2000. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 36(4), 561–583. doi:10.1111/j.1741-5705.2006.02568.x
- Cohen, P. (2014, April 29). The most comprehensive analysis ever of the gender of *New York Times* writers. *Family Inequality*. Retrieved from <https://familyinequality.wordpress.com/2014/04/29/gender-nytimes/>
- Correa, T., & Harp, D. (2011). Women matter in newsrooms: How power and critical mass relate to the coverage of the HPV vaccine. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 88(2), 301–319. doi:10.1177/107769901108800205
- Crouse, T. (1973). *The boys on the bus*. New York, NY: Ballantine.
- Everbach, T. (2006). The culture of a women-led newspaper: An ethnographic study of the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 83(3), 477–493. doi:10.1177/107769900608300301
- Greenfield, J. (2017, January 11). Do press conferences still matter? *Politico*. Retrieved from <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/01/do-press-conferences-still-matter-214620>
- Hayes, D. (2008). Party reputations, journalistic expectations: How issue ownership influences election news. *Political Communication*, 25(4), 377–400. doi:10.1080/10584600802426981
- Hess, S. (1992). All the president's reporters: A new survey of the White House press corps. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 22(2), 311–321. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27550949>
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Meeks, L. (2013). He wrote, she wrote: Journalist gender, political office, and campaign news. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 90(1), 58–74. doi:10.1177/1077699012468695
- National First Ladies' Library. (2017). *First lady biography: Eleanor Roosevelt*. Retrieved from <http://www.firstladies.org/biographies/firstladies.aspx?biography=33>
- Neuman, S. (2013, July 20). Helen Thomas, former dean of White House press, dies at 92. *NPR*. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2013/07/20/203921340/helen-thomas-long-dean->

- of-white-house-press-dies-at-92
- Newport, F., & Carroll, J. (2005, August 24). Iraq versus Vietnam: A comparison of public opinion. *Gallup*. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/18097/iraq-versus-vietnam-comparison-public-opinion.aspx>
- North, L. (2016). The gender of "soft" and "hard" news: Female journalists' views on gendered story allocations. *Journalism Studies*, 17(3), 356–373. doi:10.1080/1461670X.2014.987551
- Petrocik, J. (1996). Issue ownership in presidential elections, with a 1980 case study. *American Journal of Political Science*, 40(3), 825–850. doi:10.2307/2111797
- Petrocik, J., Benoit, W., & Hansen, G. (2003). Issue ownership and presidential campaigning, 1952–2000. *Political Science Quarterly*, 118(4), 599–626. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30035698>
- Pew Research Center. (2014, October 23). *As midterms near, GOP leads on key issues, Democrats have a more positive image*. Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/2014/10/23/as-midterms-near-gop-leads-on-key-issues-democrats-have-a-more-positive-image/>
- Quinn, S. (2009, March 9). Who sits where? *FiveThirtyEight*. Retrieved from <http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/who-sits-where/>
- Rodgers, S., & Thorson, E. (2003). A socialization perspective on male and female reporting. *Journal of Communication*, 53(4), 658–675. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2003.tb02916.x
- Ross, K. (2007). The journalist, the housewife, the citizen and the press: Women and men as sources in local news narratives. *Journalism*, 8(4), 449–473. doi:10.1177/1464884907078659
- Ryle, R. (2011). *Questioning gender: A sociological exploration*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Savransky, R. (2017, January 11). Trump berates CNN reporter: "You are fake news." *The Hill*. Retrieved from <http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/313777-trump-berates-cnn-reporter-for-fake-news>
- Shoemaker, P., & Reese, S. (1996). *Mediating the message*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Skewes, E. (2007). *Message control: How news is made on the presidential campaign trail*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Steiner, L. (2009). Gender in the newsroom. In K. Wahl-Jorgensen & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The handbook of journalism studies* (pp. 116–129). New York, NY: Routledge.

- Steiner, L. (2012). Failed theories: Explaining gender difference in journalism. *Review of Communication*, 12(3), 201–223. doi:10.1080/15358593.2012.666559
- UN Women. (2017). *Concepts and definitions*. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>
- Van Zoonen, L. (1998). One of the girls? The changing gender of journalism. In C. Carter, G. Branston, & S. Allan (Eds.), *News, gender, and power* (pp. 33–46). London, UK: Routledge.
- Wanta, W., & Foote, J. (1994). The president–news media relationship: A time series analysis of agenda-setting. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 38(4), 437–448. doi:10.1080/08838159409364277
- Weaver, D., & Wilhoit, G. (1991). *The American journalist: A portrait of U.S. news people and their work*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Women's Media Center. (2014). *WMC's research shines light on gender bias*. Retrieved from <http://www.womensmediacenter.com/about/press/press-releases/wmc-research-on-gender-bias-in-major-us-media>