

# Journalistic Narratives on Gender Inequality: A Critical Analysis.

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**Abstract:** This article critically analyses journalistic narratives on gender inequality, exploring the discursive and organisational mechanisms that contribute to the reproduction of asymmetries in media representations. Based exclusively on scientific theses and articles, it brings together contributions from Feminist Media Studies, Critical Discourse Analysis and the Sociology of Journalism. It discusses persistent stereotypes, unequal distribution of media authority, processes of symbolic annihilation, female underrepresentation in news, and the reduced visibility of women in television sports journalism. It concludes that the transformation of the media field requires conscious editorial practices, inclusive policies, and structural reconfigurations in journalistic routines.

**Keywords:** gender; journalism; media representations; inequality; discourse.

## I. Introduction

Gender inequalities have been the subject of increasing attention in the field of communication studies, particularly with regard to how the media participate in the social construction of gender identities and roles. Although the public visibility of feminist issues has increased, significant gaps remain, both in research and in journalistic practices.

Understanding journalistic narratives is central to analysing how the media participate in the production, legitimisation and reproduction of gender inequalities. The scientific literature consistently demonstrates that journalism acts as a system of symbolic construction, operating through processes of selection, hierarchisation and framing that structure public perceptions (Cerqueira & Cabecinhas, 2020). Far from being a mere reflection of social reality, media discourse defines who holds discursive authority, which issues gain visibility and which identities are marginalised. This article critically analyses journalistic narratives on gender inequality, articulating them through two central axes presented by Cerqueira and Cabecinhas (2020): production, which analyses who constructs the narratives and through which structures and practices, and reception, which observes how audiences interpret and normalise these representations. In addition, contributions from recent studies on the feminisation of newsrooms, news framing, discursive practices and emerging models of alternative and data journalism are included.

This article, based exclusively on the analysis of theses and scientific articles, ensures conceptual and methodological rigour. Contributions from Feminist Media Studies, Critical Discourse Analysis, and the Sociology of Journalism demonstrate that the articulation between production, news content, and reception is decisive for understanding the persistence of gender asymmetries in the media (Tavares, 2021; Noronha, Campos & Souza, 2022). This assessment aims to offer an integrated reading of these dynamics, systematising mechanisms

that sustain discursive inequalities and analysing emerging initiatives that seek to counteract such patterns. Thus, we will seek not only to systematise the state of the art, but also to demonstrate that gender inequalities in the media are sustained by interdependent processes — structural, discursive and cultural — that continue to limit the plurality and equity of journalistic representations.

## II. State of the Art.

The field of Feminist Media Studies has shown for decades that media representations play a central role in the construction of symbolic inequalities (Ross, 2010; Silveirinha, 2004). Mendes and Carter (2008) emphasise that journalistic practices are informed by organisational structures and cultural values that influence how women are portrayed, often in a stereotypical or marginalised way.

Cerqueira and Cabecinhas (2020) reinforce the importance of a multidimensional approach that articulates production, content and reception, pointing out that, in Portugal, the lack of studies combining these three levels limits a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

### 2.1. Persistence of Stereotypes.

Despite the growing presence of gender-related topics in the media, representational patterns remain strongly marked by stereotypes. Cerqueira and Cabecinhas' (2020) analysis of *Visão* and *Sábado* magazines shows that gender stereotypes persist, with women associated with lifestyle, family, or behaviour topics, while men dominate political, economic, and scientific areas. This pattern reveals a historical continuity in the symbolic constructions attributed to each gender. Souza (2020) confirms that unequal editorial practices continue to reinforce asymmetries, often unintentionally.

### 2.2. Feminisation of Newsrooms without Redistribution of Power

The growing presence of women in newsrooms has not been matched by an equitable distribution of leadership roles. Tavares (2021) demonstrates that positions of greater visibility — anchors, editors, commentators — remain dominated by men, revealing persistent vertical inequalities that condition female discursive authority.

### 2.3. Language and Symbolic Annihilation

Studies show that language can minimise inequalities and reinforce stereotypes. In cases of gender-based violence, news reports often frame assaults as 'marital conflicts' or 'passionate dramas,' contributing to the dilution of perpetrators' responsibility (Matos, Subtil & Baptista, 2021).

Journalistic language plays a key role in constructing gender asymmetries. Studies show that news coverage of gender-based violence often mitigates the responsibility of perpetrators and insinuates that victims are partly to blame. As Noronha, Campos and Souza (2022) observe, narratives that portray victims as provocative constitute mechanisms of symbolic annihilation that normalise structural inequalities.

### 2.4. Global Underrepresentation

The Global Media Monitoring Project shows that only 24% of people referenced in news stories are women (GMMP, 2020). This pattern is widespread and persistent, indicating structural inequality in news selection processes and the attribution of media prominence.

### **III. Lower Female Visibility in Television Sports Journalism**

Inequality is particularly evident in television sports journalism, one of the media domains most resistant to inclusion. Despite greater female participation in newsrooms, women remain underrepresented in prominent roles, such as presenting news segments, providing technical commentary, or analysing football.

According to GMMP 2025, only 15% of global sports news stories feature women as subjects (WACC, 2025). In Portugal, only 22% of news stories feature women as protagonists (CIG, 2025). Furthermore, studies by the University of Coimbra (2023) reveal that only 14% of national sports news exclusively covers women's sports, despite the significant growth in women's federated participation.

On generalist television channels, women appear mainly in studio roles or as assistant reporters, while men occupy positions of greater discursive authority as commentators or debate leaders (Ferro São Pedro, 2022). This discrepancy reinforces social perceptions that sport — and especially football — is a male domain, limiting the credibility attributed to women journalists and restricting their professional trajectories.

The implications are significant: opportunities for advancement are reduced, stereotypes of competence are perpetuated, and discursive diversity in the public sphere is restricted.

### **IV. Alternative Approaches and Transformative Practices – Alternative and Data Journalism**

Despite the predominance of asymmetrical patterns, initiatives are emerging that seek to respond to inequality. The magazine *Género e Número* demonstrates that data journalism has the potential to highlight disparities with clarity and rigour, offering analytical tools that promote discursive equity (*Género e Número*, 2023). A reading of Silva's (2018) study on the magazine *Género e Número* reiterates that data journalism, when oriented towards equity, provides new ways of representing inequalities, privileging evidence, transparency and diversity of voices.

### **V. Inclusive editorial projects**

In the portuguese context, initiatives such as the Lusa IGEN Service seek to transform news practices and promote greater balance in the visibility of women and minority groups (Matos et al., 2021).

### **VI. Current Trends and Challenges in Gender and Journalism Research.**

An analysis of journalistic narratives in light of recent literature shows that gender inequalities not only persist but also take on new forms in the contemporary media ecosystem.

Studies published after 2020 provide a deeper understanding of the persistence of gender inequalities in journalism and how these manifest themselves in both the production and reception of media narratives. Although the media has made progress in raising public awareness about gender, several recent studies show that organisational structures, discursive practices, and professional routines remain strongly marked by masculinised logic.

Let us look at examples from recent studies that have explored this perspective in greater depth, demonstrating that symbolic inequalities in the media persist even in contexts of growing awareness. Ross and Padovani (2023) emphasise that the expansion of public debate on gender has not been accompanied by structural changes in newsrooms, and Byerly (2021) shows that women's participation in decision-making positions in the media remains low overall. Similarly, North (2022) highlights that the impact of women in journalism remains limited

by the persistence of masculinised professional cultures and institutional resistance to the redistribution of editorial power.

Byerly (2021) reveals in the Global Report on the Status of Women in News Media that women remain a minority in media leadership positions globally. Even in newsrooms where women make up half — or more — of the workforce, access to decision-making positions remains limited. This pattern confirms that gender inequality is not only related to numerical participation, but also to the unequal distribution of symbolic and editorial power.

At the national level, Lúcio Martins (2023) demonstrates that, even with a significant feminisation of portuguese newsrooms, they remain structured by a masculine professional culture, in which norms, expectations and routines continue to be adjusted to models of authority historically associated with masculinity. The author also highlights that this culture impacts career progression and opportunities for female journalists, reinforcing internal asymmetries that affect news production.

Similarly, Carona's (2024) study on portuguese regional journalism concludes that inequalities become even more visible in decentralised contexts: despite representing the majority of professionals (around 60%), women hold only 15% of management positions. In addition, they often face precarious working conditions, symbolic violence and direct discrimination. This confirms that gender inequality is not the result of a lack of qualifications, but rather the perpetuation of structural and cultural dynamics that limit the recognition and mobility of female journalists.

At the international level, the Reuters Institute (2024) shows that only 24% of editors-in-chief in 240 media outlets in 12 countries are women, even though women represent approximately 40% of all media professionals. These figures confirm that the exclusion of women from positions of media power is a global and persistent phenomenon, fuelled by institutional mechanisms that continue to favour male careers.

On a discursive level, recent research also highlights that journalistic language remains a determining factor in maintaining asymmetries. Mendes and Way (2021) analyse media coverage of gender-based violence in the post-pandemic context and conclude that much of the discourse continues to minimise the responsibility of perpetrators, reproducing frameworks that reinforce the normalisation of violence. This type of narrative functions as a mechanism for naturalising inequalities, affecting the way audiences interpret these issues.

Finally, research by Harmer and Savigny (2022) on digital media shows that, although online platforms increase female participation, they also intensify phenomena such as misogyny, harassment and discrediting, especially directed at female journalists. In the field of sports journalism — already characterised by strong masculinisation — these attacks contribute to reduced visibility and limited opportunities for advancement.

Thus, the literature analysed since 2020 confirms that gender inequalities in journalism result from the articulation between structural dynamics (persistent male leadership), biased media discourse, masculinised professional cultures, and reception processes that normalise stereotypes. The convergence of these factors demonstrates that change requires a multidimensional approach that goes beyond the simple presence of women in newsrooms and involves profound transformations in editorial practices, news selection criteria, and discursive frameworks.

## VII. Final Note

The analysis carried out demonstrates that journalistic narratives continue to reproduce structural inequalities. As Souza (2021) summarises, transforming these dynamics requires conscious editorial practices, inclusive policies, and a critical commitment to gender equality. Thus, reconfiguring journalistic narratives is not only a media

challenge but also a democratic imperative. As we believe it to be relevant, let us focus on authors such as Cerqueira and Cabecinhas (2020), who point out that only studies that articulate production, content, and reception can reveal and transform the subtle mechanisms that perpetuate gender inequalities in the media.

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