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BLOCK HER ENTRY, KEEP HER DOWN AND PUSH HER OUT

Gender discrimination and women journalists in the Arab world

Jad P. Melki and **Sarah E. Mallat**

This study examines why female journalists in an Arab country continue to be marginalized. It hypothesized that a set of interrelated factors, pertaining to gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and the lack of a legally and socially enabling environment, work together to systematically discourage and block women's entry into the news field, push those who made it out of the profession, and keep those who have endured down and siloed in specific roles away from decision-making and policy-setting positions. The study uses a mixed-methods approach, including a survey of 250 Lebanese, Arab and international female journalists working in Lebanon, qualitative interviews with 26 female journalists, as well as analysis of ownership documents and minutes of board meetings. Findings suggest that structural, institutional and cultural obstacles that have faced women for centuries around the globe continue to operate with potent effects in Lebanon, and by extension in the Arab region.

KEYWORDS Arab journalism; Arab media; journalism; media and gender; media and sexual harassment; media in Lebanon; media literacy; news literacy

Introduction

Despite major gains in the past century, female journalists are still underrepresented in the news industry, particularly in decision-making and policy-setting positions. Studies continue to highlight the prevalence and impact of gender discrimination on women's status in the Western news industry (Brown and Flatow 1997; Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming 2004; Flatow 1994; McAdams and Beasley 1994; Walsh-Childers, Chance, and Herzog 1996). However, similar studies focused on Arab news-making and reporting are scarce and often ignore sensitive topics, such as sexual harassment, as these topics in general remain largely overlooked taboos (Keyton, Ferguson, and Rhodes 2001), particularly in male-dominated fields (Kim and Kleiner 1999), and especially in the Arab region. The few extant studies show that men in Arab news significantly outnumber women, with greater disparity at top-level management positions (Byerly 2011). Furthermore, "newsroom policies on gender ... do not show strong support for gender equality" and the majority have no policy on sexual harassment (66).

This article reports findings from a national study that may serve as a catalyst for an in-depth inquiry into this chronic problem, and Lebanon presents an appropriate case for the Arab region. Lebanon encompasses a wide variety of local, Arab and international news institutions and journalists. Its relatively free media landscape, liberal culture and significant participation of women in the workforce provide a more empowering environment for female journalists and therefore—we assume—should be on the

forefront of Arab news industries when it comes to gender equality. In addition, Lebanon's active women's rights movement, which successfully advanced several laws recently—including implementing tougher sentences for honor crimes and passing a domestic violence law—continues to advocate for further change, including a recent push for anti-sexual harassment laws.

The issue of sexual harassment has recently garnered increased attention, due to amplified media coverage of sexual assaults on female journalists—and citizens—during the Arab uprisings. Still, reliable data essential for policy change advocacy remain rare, mostly unconnected to journalism, and widely disparate in their findings. For example, a 2010 survey reported 76 percent of Lebanese women expressed never experiencing sexual harassment at work (IWPR 2012). In contrast, El Deeb (2013) found that 99.3 percent of Egyptian girls and women (age 10–35) reported experiencing sexual harassment.

Nevertheless, international media attention afforded to a wave of attacks in Egypt has highlighted the ubiquity of sexual harassment facing female journalists in the Arab world, especially after reporters Muna al Tahawi and Caroline Sinz detailed their experiences on air “with unprecedented frankness” (Sidahmed 2012). This prompted local activists to create harassmap.org and attracted significant attention from Lebanese media. One report described the numerous occasions where Lebanese politicians sexually harassed female journalists covering parliament (Saud 2012). This highlighted the fact that Lebanon's penal code and its press syndicate's code of professional conduct are void of any anti-sexual harassment stipulations, while references to gender discrimination are vague and conflated with general discrimination categories. Prompted by this momentum, Lebanese female journalists became more outspoken about the subject and, for the first time, discussed personal experiences on television (Gatten 2012; Khalife 2012).

But understanding the chronic problems Arab women journalists face cannot be reduced to counting the frequency of sexual harassment and gender discrimination incidents. As such, this study employed both social science and interpretive approaches to investigate in-depth why female journalists in the Arab world continue to be marginalized. Based on preliminary research (Byerly 2011; Melki and Mallat 2013), we hypothesize that an array of interacting factors, pertaining to gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and the lack of a legally and socially enabling environment, work in tandem to systematically discourage and block the entry of women into the news field, push those who made it out of the profession, and keep those who endured down and siloed in specific roles away from positions of power. We argue that these structural, institutional and cultural obstacles that have faced women for centuries around the globe continue to potently operate in Lebanon, and by extension in the Arab region.

We hope to provide Arab women's rights activists with evidence to help them advocate for change and to add needed literature to Arab journalism and media literacy curricula, where “gender issues and studies are absent from university curricula in general, and from journalism programs in particular” (Dabbous-Sensenig 2002, 1).

Uncovering Gendered Practices in News

Despite the early adoption of progressive legislation against gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the West, these issues remained largely ignored by the general public, media and academic communities during the latter half of the twentieth century. Although gender discrimination and sexual harassment violate Title VII of the US Civil

Rights Act of 1964 (Kim and Kleiner 1999) and the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1980), these topics did not attract serious attention until the mid-1990s, spurred by the landmark 1991 Hill-Thomas controversy (McAdams and Beasley 1994). The media frenzy surrounding this and similar sexual harassment cases unleashed a nationwide dialogue and sparked a flurry of research on gendered practices in the workplace (Fitzgerald and Shulman 1993; Harned et al. 2002).

Gender discrimination is defined as “all forms of differentiation, exclusion, or limitation, made without any justifiable reason on the basis of one’s sex” (Harvard School of Public Health 1999, 1). In the workplace setting, this includes unequal pay, benefits, hiring policies and opportunities for advancement. Overt employment discrimination based on gender is illegal in numerous countries (Kabat-Farr and Cortina 2012). However, the gender pay gap remains a ubiquitous problem worldwide (Tharenou 2013), and the “ever-present ‘glass ceiling’ still deters the advancement of large segments of the female workforce” (Gregory 2003, 1). Gender discrimination continues to exist globally, at all employment levels and in nearly all job categories. This holds true for the most blatant form of gender discrimination: sexual harassment.

The socio-legal recognition of sexual harassment emerged in the United States as a result of a feminist grassroots movement (MacKinnon 1979). One of the earliest definitions categorized sexual harassment as encompassing any “unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature” (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 1980, para. 1). However, this narrow definition “de-emphasized environmental and non-personal forms of harassment” (Gruber 1992, 461), suggesting that much of the earliest research may have underestimated its ubiquity (Lach and Gwartney-Gibbs 1993).

While the percentage of US women who report experiencing sexual harassment varies from study to study, even the most conservative estimates consistently put the prevalence above 40 percent (Fitzgerald and Shulman 1993; Flatow 1994; Lach and Gwartney-Gibbs 1993; Richman et al. 1999). Harned et al. (2002, 174) stressed that “research has confirmed that approximately 50% of [American] women will experience sexual harassment at some point in their working lives.” The literature asserts that sexual harassment consists of three theoretically distinct but related categories of behavior: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion (Gelfand, Fitzgerald, and Drasgow 1995; Lim and Cortina 2005; Richman et al. 1999). This study adopted Brown and Flatow’s (1997) more precise sub-categories: verbal, non-verbal, environmental, threatening (*quid pro quo*) and physical sexual harassment.

Extant literature has established the negative health and economic effects of gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace, including increased incidence of physical and mental illness, decreased job performance and satisfaction, and substance abuse and addiction (McDonald 2012; Munson, Hulin, and Drasgow 2000). In turn, these practices negatively affect employers—particularly in terms of decreased corporate productivity, increased employee absenteeism and turnover, and higher health insurance and legal costs (Gilbert, Guerrier, and Guy 1998; McDonald 2012).

McDonald (2012, 11) notes the mixed findings of studies on gender discrimination and sexual harassment and cautions from drawing conclusions about longitudinal trends because “varying cultural, historical, and socio-legal features across national contexts inevitably impact findings.” Nonetheless, explanatory frameworks discussed in the extant literature provide a foundation in approaching these topics for Lebanon and the Arab

world. Tangri, Burt, and Johnson (1984) proposed three dominant explanatory models for gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace: the natural/biological model, the sociocultural model and the organizational model.

The natural/biological model suggests that sexual harassment and gender discrimination are not actually forms of harassment—nor are they discriminatory, sexist practices—since they stem from natural feelings of sexual desire, primarily by men toward women (Berdahl 2007). Recent literature largely dismisses this explanation, mainly because of its inability to explain instances of same-sex harassment and harassment of men by women in positions of power (Foote and Goodman-Delahunty 2005).

The organizational model focuses on power differentials within the context of the organization, including hierarchy, authority relations and workplace culture. It argues that women tend to be harassed more than men “because more men are in positions of organizational power” (Brown and Flatow 1997, 162).

The sociocultural model proposes two explanations: sex-role spillover and social power perspectives. The former posits that gender discrimination and sexual harassment are the result of normative sex-roles (i.e. men as sexual agents and women as sexual objects) “spilling over” from society at large into the work environment (Gutek, Cohen, and Konrad, 1990; Gutek and Morasch 1982). This argument maintains that gendered practices occur because a female employee’s sex-role is her most distinctive feature in both male-dominated and female-dominated work environments. Social power perspectives, which have gained increased attention in recent literature (McDonald 2012), argue that the phenomena of gender discrimination and sexual harassment are an extension of men’s economic power over women (MacKinnon 1979; Zalk 1990).

Studies of gender discrimination and sexual harassment in US newsrooms show varying degrees of support for both the organizational and sociocultural models. Thus, they serve as a practical launching pad for understanding these matters in Lebanon, keeping in mind the specificities of this Arab country.

Labor, Legal and Political Status of Lebanese Women and Female Journalists

Men outnumber women by a ratio exceeding two-to-one in Lebanese news institutions (Byerly 2011). Nevertheless, this acute disparity remains better than the three-to-one overall gender gap in labor-force participation (WEF 2011) and far better than many professional sectors (e.g. engineering and medicine). The situation, however, is worst in the political sphere. Although Lebanese women earned the right to vote and run for office in 1953, their—mostly nominal—representation in parliament has remained well below 5 percent throughout, and it is even worse in the government’s executive branch and municipal leadership positions (Melki and Mallat 2013). Women’s representation in the judicial system is somewhat better. Female judges make up 38 percent of civil, commercial and criminal courts, and 28 percent of administrative courts (Khalaf 2010). Despite these modest improvements in access to justice and political rights, the overall employment picture nonetheless remains bleak. In 1995, the percentage of women in paid employment in non-agricultural sectors stood at a dismal 14.2 percent (UN 2012). In 2011, it rose to 33 percent, but women’s estimated earned income was US\$5186 compared to \$21,288 for men (WEF 2011).

The gender gap, lack of pay parity, unequal hiring practices and promotion opportunities, and persistent presence of the glass ceiling varies from one profession to

another, but largely reflect the inequitable picture that pervades Lebanese corporations (Amel Association and CESTAS 2010; Jamali, Safieddine, and Daouk 2006; Khalaf 2010). Combined with the pervasive lack of a legal framework or professional code of conduct to mitigate gendered practices in the workplace, women in Lebanon continue to face working environments hostile to their advancement. This problem becomes further compounded in industries that have been traditionally dominated by men, such as news.

Many feminist scholars (Abu Lughod 2001; Joseph and Slyomovics 2001; Kandiyoti 1996; Mernissi 2002; Singerman 1995) and international development organizations have noted the importance of investigating specific segments of society that are indicative of women's overall status in their respective societies. Paramount among these is women's enrollment in higher tiers of education (secondary and tertiary) and their level of political participation. Equally indicative are the number of women who hold positions of power and decision-making in governmental, economic and media capacities (UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women 2011; World Bank 2012; WEF 2012). As Sakr (2004, 4) argues, the latter is particularly salient because "if the mass media form part of the apparatus through which particular gender roles and attributes are defined and assigned, it follows that the media will also be a site for negotiating changes in those definitions." However, Dabbous-Sensenig (2000, 2002) argues that there remains a void when it comes to understanding the intersection of gender and media within Lebanon's specific cultural, political and economic milieus. In fact, much of what is published on news and gender in Lebanon tends to be superficial. Even Sakr's (2004) chapter on Lebanon offers little more than a celebration of the careers of a handful of popular Lebanese media figures.

More recent attempts to provide a better understanding of the current situation in Lebanon are the publications of Byerly (2011, 2013). As noted, Byerly (2011) found that men outnumber women in the Lebanese news industry by a ratio exceeding two-to-one, with much greater disparity at top-level management positions. The discrepancy between women working in the field and those holding positions of power is even more flagrant if we consider statistics of enrollment in Lebanese journalism programs. For years, journalism programs in Lebanon have enrolled, on average, four females for every male student (Melki 2009). This suggests that strong factors preclude many women from entering the field and advancing to upper management positions (Melki and Mallat 2013). For the women who do manage to break into the field, they face newsroom policies that ignore gender discrimination and sexual harassment (Byerly 2011).

The Byerly (2011) report based its findings on interviews with media managers and Human Resources departments, mainly, and beyond a lack of corporate policies, discussion of sexual harassment in this study remains secondary. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence from local media reports and quotidian discussions on women's rights websites, personal blogs and other online forums suggest that sexual harassment is a significant issue for women in Lebanon—both in the workplace and beyond (Gatten 2012; Khalife 2012; Saud 2012). This raises questions about the veracity of existing data, such as the aforementioned 2010 survey, which found over three-quarters of Lebanese women expressed never experiencing sexual harassment at work (IWPR 2012). The apparent disconnect between the daily, lived experiences as expressed in media reports/informal online platforms and scholarly findings points to a need for more in-depth, industry-specific and culturally sensitive research on the topic.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods approach that included surveying 250 and interviewing in-depth 26 female journalists working at 80 local, Arab and international news institutions operating in Lebanon, as well as 21 freelancers. The total number of sampled participants was 341 ($80 \times 4 + 21$ freelancers) with a response/completion rate of 73 percent. The sample size was derived from an *a priori* sample power analysis for a chi-square test, based on the assumptions of $\alpha = 0.05$, an estimated population of 3000 and a confidence interval of ± 5 .

The study randomly sampled women from various levels in the corporate media hierarchy at the top 11 TV stations,¹ 8 radio stations,² 14 newspapers,³ 8 magazines,⁴ 13 online news sites,⁵ 8 newswire services⁶ and 18 international news operations.⁷ Researchers used publicly available emails to build a comprehensive sampling frame of female journalists from these companies, and randomly sampled up to four female news professionals from each. Participants came from all major religions in Lebanon: 48 percent (108) Christian, 41 percent (93) Muslim and 11 percent (24) atheist/agnostic. They were distributed among the different news media: 45 percent (112) television, 28 percent (71) print, 16 percent (39) online, 6 percent (14) radio and 6 percent (14) news agencies.

For qualitative interviews, a purposive sampling technique was used. A select number of participants taking the survey were asked whether they were interested in participating in an in-depth interview. These were selected with the intention of collecting a diverse sample pertaining to age, seniority, position and specialization. Researchers stopped at 26 participants after having achieved information redundancy.

The survey questionnaire measured the frequency and nature of gender discrimination in Lebanese newsrooms, the extent to which the Lebanese newsroom is sexualized, and the prevalence of verbal, non-verbal, environmental, physical and threatening sexual harassment incidents, their perpetrators, and their relationship to age, position and medium. Qualitative interviews sought in-depth information about the circumstances, reactions and repercussions of gender discrimination and sexual harassment.

Results and Discussion

Journalism, a Man's Career, a Single Women's Short-term Stint

The vast majority of surveyed participants were young, never married and had no children. In fact, 71 percent (175) were 18–34, while 17 percent (42) were 35–44 and 11 percent (28) were over 45. In addition, 68 percent (169) were never married, 29 percent (73) were currently married and 3 percent (7) were previously married; 73 percent (182) had no children. Moreover, the majority had a relatively short career in journalism—less than 10 years. In fact, 43 percent (106) worked less than 5 years, 25 percent (59) worked for 5–10 years, 15 percent (38) for 10–15 years and 17 percent for more than 15 years. This indicates that marriage and children are possible barriers to career longevity and advancement, since most women worked in news for no more than 5–10 years after college, which coincides with the average marriage age of 30 in Lebanon (Hammoud 2012). Consistently, qualitative interviews suggest that female journalists saw marriage and motherhood as hurdles and assumed that their managers did so too. Many interviewees expressed concern that their superiors harbor underlying assumptions that when women marry and have children, they lose the desire and drive to advance to senior positions.

Even the few married participants complained that marriage and children often mean re-proving one's value to the institution. One managing editor explained:

Women have to make much more of an effort to get ahead, and it starts all over again if you happen to get married and especially if you become a mother. It's expected that when you become a mother and wife that your professional ambition and drive will decrease or disappear altogether because your priorities shift. So you have to prove yourself all over again. (personal communication, August 21, 2012)

Studies of Western news show that conflict between the role of journalist and mother/spouse and balancing family and career have evolved from being "barriers" to posing "challenges" to female journalists' advancement (Engstrom and Ferri 1998). Unfortunately, the predominantly young, unmarried and childless makeup of female journalists in Lebanon suggests that these factors remain potent obstacles that push women to settle for less ambitious positions or quit the profession altogether.

Moreover, many interviewees blamed women for perpetuating the glass ceiling because of their career choices once they become wives/mothers: opting for desk jobs and avoiding risky assignments. A news director at one of the few Lebanese news organizations where women hold many senior positions argued that the dearth of women in such decision-making capacities is an extension of Lebanon's patriarchal society, but also insisted that many women compound the imbalance by deciding to forego professional advancement and voluntarily remain in junior positions so that they can devote more time and attention to their families. As one former journalist who worked for over three decades at an Arabic daily explained: "After I had a child, I stopped taking risks to get a story. It just wasn't worth it. I asked for a desk job; I didn't want to cover the war anymore. There were car bombs everywhere, and I wasn't willing to orphan my children." Eventually the newspaper decided that her salary was too high for a desk job. She was laid off and switched to part-time work and teaching journalism (personal communication, January 29, 2013).

This dilemma raises the uncomfortable question concerning whether and if women in demanding industries can successfully climb the professional ladder while also pursuing marriage and family. The issue is certainly not unique to Lebanon (Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming 2004); gender studies and popular discourse are embroiled in this debate, epitomized by Sandberg's (2013) best-selling US book, *Lean In*.

Un-leveling the Playing Field with Benefits: Childcare, Maternity Leave and Paternity Leave

Nevertheless, many veteran journalists noted that Lebanese society has changed dramatically since they entered the news industry, and that professional women face better odds today. This may be due to increased but slow acceptance of the Lebanese father as a partner also responsible for domestic duties, but is more significantly mediated by the prevalent phenomenon of inexpensive domestic workers, who labor in everything from housekeeping to childrearing and gardening for a meager salary well below the minimum wage⁸ and thus are affordable to many Lebanese families (Abdulrahim 2010).

Still, many interviewees blamed Lebanese laws and corporate policies that need to better address childcare, paternity leave and extended maternity leave. This is corroborated by the survey results; only 6 percent (15) reported that their companies offered paternity leave, 10 percent (26) said they offered childcare assistance and 55 percent (137)

said they offered maternity leave. The latter percentage is most surprising, since Lebanese law currently mandates 10 weeks of paid maternity leave—a significant improvement over the seven-week leave mandated before March 2014, but well below the International Labor Organization’s (1998) recommended 12–14 weeks. In-depth interviews reveal a loophole widely abused by the news industry. For example, one young Lebanese reporter working at a local Arabic TV station bemoaned the fact that, despite six years of journalistic experience, “I currently work 45-plus hours per week, yet I am considered a freelancer, without a contract or any benefits” (personal communication, September 7, 2012). While she acknowledged responsibility for accepting such working conditions with “full knowledge that the company is not complying with labor laws,” she noted that it was better than unemployment. Reiterated by several interviewees, this reality highlights the obstructive institutional policies that work against the advancement of women journalists into higher positions of power, which is confirmed by the occupational distribution of the surveyed women.

Higher Education, Siloed Occupations and a Glass Ceiling with Nepotistic Ladders

For a highly educated population, female journalists in Lebanon remain siloed into a narrow set of news jobs and stuck below the glass ceiling, but even the few who broke through have only nominal power. Almost all surveyed participants (93 percent, 231) held a bachelor’s degree, and a majority (55 percent, 137) held a postgraduate degree, yet Table 1 shows that very few female journalists occupied middle to top management positions, and barely any were in governance. This corroborates Byerly’s (2011) findings that women in Lebanese media institutions make up only 14.8 percent of governance and 21.9 percent of top-tier management (63).

Moreover, even the meager 1 percent (3) in governance/ownership is exaggerated if one looks closely at the real stockholders of media companies in Lebanon. Almost all main female stockholders are sisters, daughters, wives or sisters-in-law of the real male figures in charge of the institution (Melki et al. 2012). Take, for example, the top TV stations in Lebanon. The three main females who collectively own 28 percent of Orange TV are the daughters of Michael Aoun.⁹ The four females who own together 27.6 percent of LBCI are the sisters-in-law and wife of Pierre el-Daher.¹⁰ At Future TV, two women own 20 percent

TABLE 1
Distribution of positions of female journalists in the news industry

Occupation/position	% (N)
Governance or ownership	1 (3)
Top or senior management	5 (13)
Middle management	6 (15)
Reporter	56 (141)
Editor	30 (74)
Web/content editor	14 (36)
Producer	14 (35)
Anchor or presenter	9 (22)
Production (photography, camera, audio-visual editing)	8 (19)
Columnist	3 (7)
Designer	1 (3)

of the company's shares: Rafik Hariri's¹¹ sister and his wife. At Murr TV, the daughter of Gabriel al-Murr¹² controls 10 percent of the shares.¹³ Although the competence of these women is not in question, it is untenable to claim that their power is independent from the main male owners of their respective stations, especially when one examines the minutes of the board meetings, where the listed female stockholders are commonly absent and represented by male proxies. In other words, the few privileged women who have "broken through" the glass ceiling are mainly names on paper, thanks to widespread nepotism. Ironically, these dependent female names exist on company shareholder's rosters precisely to keep the real male owners in power, given that it is a common tactic owners use to evade the 10 percent legal limit on ownership for individuals (Melki et al. 2012). So, these few women do not even offer a minute counterbalance in favor of gender equality, but in fact serve to maintain the same patriarchy that subjugates them.

This also applies to the top/senior management level. For example, al-Jadeed TV's capable deputy news director is the daughter of the station's main owner Tahseen Khayyat.¹⁴ And moving down the corporate ladder, male dominance persists. In fact, almost two-thirds of survey respondents (65 percent, 148) reported having a male supervisor, while over two-thirds (67 percent, 163) said they did not supervise any employees. Only 18 percent (44) supervised 1–5 employees, and 12 percent (28) supervised 6–25 employees, while 3 percent (8) supervised more than 25 employees.

Also significant is the low percentage of women working in creative and technical positions. This suggests that female journalists are restricted to a narrow set of jobs, mainly reporting and editing.

These figures reflect international trends (Byerly 2013). They suggest a prevalent and systematic mechanism of gender discrimination at the institutional and macro levels that works in tandem with social and historical factors that keep women journalists from persisting in this profession and from advancing their careers and climbing the corporate ladder. But gender discrimination also works at the micro level in the daily interaction of journalists, managers and news sources.

Gender Stereotypes, Focus on Appearance and the Benefits of Benevolent Sexism

Interviews revealed a palpable sense of frustration with what many female journalists perceived as discriminatory hiring and promotion practices based on looks: giving good-looking, young, sexy or flirtatious women higher salaries, better scoops and more airtime, regardless of their capabilities. This was particularly salient in television. As one local TV anchor recounted, "For anchors in particular, it no longer matters that one has the right training, education or experience. Women think that they can just be pretty and get on screen" (personal communication, October 12, 2012). A veteran senior correspondent for an international news bureau agreed: "The majority are not qualified to present the news, but the attention is focused on how they look and what they wear rather than how they conduct interviews, present news or even the content of their news." She gave an example of a veteran presenter:

She used to have a big birthmark on her face when she started anchoring her morning news show. The owner asked her to remove it if she wanted to continue presenting, and she did. Is this a form of gender discrimination? It certainly isn't professional or encouraging for young journalists. (personal communication, January 23, 2013)

Studies of Western newsrooms have shown this focus on appearance has been a persistent challenge since the 1970s, especially in television (Orlik 2008). Engstrom and Ferri (1998, 794) highlighted this gendered discrepancy: “male anchors are allowed more leeway in terms of looks ... ‘Men can grow old, have facial hair and be bald, where women must be young, pretty and perky.’”. A cursory look at Lebanese (and Arab) TV newscasts reflects an almost identical picture of old bald anchormen contrasted with “young, pretty and perky” female anchors, and while the former seem to mainly handle serious hard news, the latter are often allocated soft and “less serious” news.

Indeed, many interviewees complained about not being taken seriously when it comes to story assignments. This seems particularly problematic for beginners, and more experienced journalists admitted facing similar challenges as newcomers, but contended that with time, hard work and persistence, they were able to overcome such gendered stereotypes and prove their capabilities. A senior editor at an online English outlet explained:

When I started, all the political and analytical stories were assigned to men. I really had to fight to cover stories I was interested in. I pitched stories, and often I would just write them and send them in without conferring with my superiors. I had to jump on stories that other people were writing by offering contacts and tips so that they would begin to hear me and realize that I was competent and capable of covering such topics. (personal communication, August 21, 2012)

Young interviewees also highlighted the challenges of making their news sources take them seriously. One young reporter described:

When I’m covering male officials or businessmen, it’s a never-ending, vicious cycle of phone calls. The minute they hear my voice and realize I’m a woman, they don’t take me seriously. Whereas, I witness the male reporters getting through quite easily. (personal communication, January 16, 2013)

Survey results tend to weakly reflect this matter, as only 18 percent (44) of respondents believed that if they were men, their news sources would take them more seriously. However, almost all of these respondents (86 percent, 37) were younger than 34 and tended to have less than five years of experience, which confirms the notion that this challenge mainly impacts inexperienced journalists and is a matter they can overcome with time.

Consistently, [Table 2](#) shows that the most common gender discrimination complaint is related to news story assignment, followed by willingness of male peers, subordinates and superiors to take directions from or seriously consider the opinions of female journalists. These challenges are also predominantly reported by younger and less-experienced journalists.

On the other hand, some interviewees pointed out that being a woman may offer some advantages, including access to private and conservative domains, to which male reporters are often blocked. Moreover, many interviewees asserted that people are more protective of and accommodating to female journalists, especially when covering violence. Several interviewees relegated this to traditional patriarchal values, especially stigmas against shame associated with harming or insulting women and a sense of duty in protecting them, but also a view of women as less threatening than men. One young expatriate working for a local English news outlet noted:

TABLE 2

Prevalence of gender discrimination in the news workplace

Percentage of female journalists who reported experiencing a form of gender discrimination	% (N)
Experienced any of the following forms of gender discrimination	38 (95)
Requested covering a story but was told she cannot because of her gender	20 (48)
Was re-assigned to a different story or task because of her gender	20 (47)
A junior employee refused to take directions from her because of her gender	16 (38)
A co-worker ignored her opinion or request because of her gender	16 (38)
A superior ignored her opinion or request because of her gender	13 (32)
Was declined a promotion because of her gender	12 (29)
A co-worker refused to work with her because of her gender	8 (19)

Being a woman fosters greater access to more conservative individuals—like very conservative Muslim women, who would not be inclined to speak freely, if at all, with a male journalist ... And when it comes to covering stories in dangerous areas, there's a sense of chivalry and protection towards women reporters by the locals. (personal communication, August 14, 2012)

This conviction was especially prominent among religiously observant interviewees:

My gender is an advantage and a positive attribute for my work, especially because I wear the hijab [veil]. Muslims appreciate and respect it, and if they know that I'm a believer oftentimes they are more comfortable talking to me. With foreigners or non-Muslims, it also helps because they want to appear tolerant. (personal communication, November 7, 2012)

Veiled or not, these advantages seem to be restrictive symptoms of a patriarchal society and the conservative communities within it, and may fall under benevolent sexism, which present women as weak, reinforces gendered power differences, increases women's acceptance of gender discrimination and discourages them from engaging in collective action to advance gender equality (Becker and Swim 2011).

Income Parity or the Illusion Thereof

Pay parity seems to be less problematic for female journalists in Lebanon. Results show that female participants received a relatively reasonable salary that also seems to be on a par with their male colleagues. Survey data reflect a median annual income range of US\$12,000–24,000, well above Lebanon's Gross National Income per capita of \$9190 (World Bank 2012). Specifically, one-third (32 percent, 75) reported making less than \$12,000 per year, 43 percent (103) reported \$12,000–24,000, 12 percent (29) reported \$24,001–36,000 and 13 percent (30) reported making over \$36,000.

More significantly, most participants believed that pay parity has been achieved. An overwhelming majority (86 percent, 195) agreed that men and women get paid the same for doing the same work, while only 13 percent (29) believed that men get paid more and 1 percent (2) believed the opposite. This perception of pay equity is consistent with Byerly's (2011) comparison of salaries acquired from Human Resources departments of Lebanese media.

Moreover, even those who were certain they receive unequal pay believed that they could achieve pay parity with time. One young expatriate reporting for a local English-language newspaper said, "I'm positive I get paid less than my male colleagues because we openly discuss our salaries" (personal communication, August 20, 2012). Still, she is confident that she will be able to "argue for a raise in the future, once I pay my dues." Consistently, veteran journalists insisted that their organizations uphold pay parity; "it's more an issue of ... how much experience you have working in the industry" (personal communication, October 12, 2012). Survey data further corroborate this notion through a positive correlation ($r = 0.504$, $N = 234$, $p = 0.0$) between work experience and income. But whether pay parity indeed exists or is an illusion—a matter future research should address, a more potent problem seems to offset its perceived advantage.

Sexualized News Environment, Sexual Harassment and Its Powerful Perpetrators

Studies have found that highly sexualized work environments negatively affect women's self-esteem, expose them to additional discrimination, and encourage harassing and non-harassing sexual behavior, especially because men often misinterpret friendly and warm behavior as sexual interest (Guttek et al. 1990; Harnish et al. 1990; Philaretou and Young 2007; Williams et al. 1999). The survey assessed the extent to which female journalists perceived their work environment to be sexualized, by measuring the prevalence of sexual jokes and pressures to appear sexually attractive.

Indeed, the majority (54 percent, 133) indicated that joking or talking about sexual matters *sometimes or often* occurs in their workplace. A quarter (25 percent, 64) said it occurs rarely and 20 percent (50) said it never occurs. Table 3 indicates that the majority saw their work environment put pressure on women (and to a lesser extent on men) to appear sexually attractive or present oneself in sexually seductive ways.

As for the prevalence of sexual harassment, survey results show that two in every three female journalists (65 percent, 163) experienced at least one type of sexual harassment at least once in their careers. The most prevalent type is verbal sexual harassment, followed by non-verbal sexual harassment, physical sexual harassment, threatening (*quid pro quo*) sexual harassment and environmental sexual harassment (Table 4).

Ironically, 9 percent (21) experienced physical assault/violence of a non-sexual nature at least once, less than any form of sexual harassment, although violence against journalists garners much more attention from the Arab media and local and international non-governmental organizations (e.g. Committee to Protect Journalists, Samir Kassir Foundation), not to mention the many workshops that train journalists for dangerous areas.

TABLE 3
The extent to which the work environment is sexualized

At your workplace, how many:	None	Few	Some or many
Women dress to appear sexually attractive to men?	28 (69)	43 (104)	29 (70)
Women present themselves in sexually seductive ways to men?	44 (107)	38 (91)	18 (44)
Men dress to appear sexually attractive to women?	68 (164)	22 (54)	10 (23)
Men present themselves in sexually seductive ways to women?	60 (144)	28 (67)	13 (31)

Values are percentages (N).

TABLE 4

Prevalence of sexual harassment in the journalism work environment

Percentage of female journalists who reported experiencing a type of sexual harassment at least once	% (N)
Any type of sexual harassment	65 (163)
Verbal sexual harassment	60 (147)
Non-verbal sexual harassment	48 (116)
Physical sexual harassment	27 (66)
Threatening (<i>quid pro quo</i>) sexual harassment	10 (24)
Environmental sexual harassment	10 (24)
Assault/violence of a non-sexual nature	9 (21)

Moreover, interviewees highlighted the ubiquity of sexual harassment beyond their work and in the broader society. It is telling that when asked about their experiences with sexual harassment, multiple Lebanese and foreign journalists asked whether the question pertains to work or more generally on a day-to-day basis. As one foreign journalist noted: "it's a blurry line ... between dealing with sexual harassment in daily life and while I'm on the job ... There's not a day that goes by that I'm not harassed. If the job requires leaving the office, then it automatically entails getting harassed on the street" (personal communication, August 20, 2012).

Survey participants also indicated the main sources for each type of sexual harassment. Table 5 ranks and divides sources into two groups (in the field and in the workplace). Overall, general publics ranked highest as offenders in the field, while co-workers ranked highest in the workplace. More importantly, though, government/political sources and employers/supervisors ranked highest for threatening (*quid pro quo*) sexual harassment, and government/political sources also ranked highest for verbal sexual harassment.

The ubiquity of threatening sexual harassment was recently highlighted in the media. One talk show hosted young women who shared similar experiences during job interviews—promises of unusually high salaries, prestigious positions, travel opportunities, etc., with the understanding that certain favors were expected in return (Maktabi 2013). The news also has been abuzz with accounts of female journalists publicly facing verbal sexual harassment from senior Lebanese politicians. One article sub-headlined "The Deputies of Arousal and Perversion" offered an especially explicit account of sexual harassment encounters with Lebanese parliamentarians and ministers (Saud 2012). But the story that brought sexual harassment to the fore and promoted calls for anti-sexual harassment legislation is the highly publicized covert recording of a public employee being sexually harassed by a governor, who in an unprecedented move resigned his post (*The Daily Star* 2014).

Interviewees also highlighted the ubiquity of threatening sexual harassment within the newsroom. One participant elaborated that she was repeatedly propositioned for sex by a superior and subsequently was denied stories and promotions when she declined. Eventually, she:

pressed charges and convinced other women to testify against him. He did end up being charged with sexual abuse, but not sexual harassment because it is not technically

TABLE 5
The main sources of sexual harassment

Who is the main source of sexual harassment for each type?	Non-					Overall (sum)	Assault
	Verbal	verbal	Physical	Threatening	Environmental		
In the field							
Other news source (public)	2 (46)	1 (52)	1 (24)	3 (4)	1 (6)	1 (132)	1 (11)
Government or political source	1 (51)	2 (30)	2 (11)	1 (10)	3 (0)	2 (102)	3 (3)
Soldiers, police or security	3 (42)	2 (30)	4 (4)	4 (2)	3 (0)	3 (78)	2 (10)
Business or industry source	4 (24)	3 (21)	3 (7)	2 (5)	2 (3)	4 (60)	3 (3)
In the workplace							
Co-worker in your company	1 (62)	1 (37)	1 (22)	2 (5)	1 (11)	1 (137)	1 (2)
Journalist from other company	2 (43)	2 (30)	2 (12)	3 (4)	3 (2)	2 (91)	1 (2)
Employer/supervisor	3 (21)	3 (12)	3 (8)	1 (7)	2 (3)	3 (51)	1 (2)

Values are rank (*N*).

considered a crime in the Lebanese penal code. He was sentenced to two years in prison, but served one. (personal communication, September 7, 2012)

The problem is that establishing “sexual abuse” in a court is much more difficult than proving sexual harassment—had there been such a law. Moreover, this example exhibits unusual courage in facing such powerful perpetrators in a legally disempowering environment. So, it is important to ask how many female journalists faced similar threatening sexual harassment—especially during job recruitment and early in their careers—and decided to quit rather than fight for their rights and risk a backlash of shame and blame. This is particularly problematic in a profession where jobs are scarce, competition is fierce, men dominate the industry and laws are void of protection against sexual harassment.

Furthermore, many interviewees noted that while sexual harassment may be more *common* in the workplace, it is more *problematic* in the field. In the workplace, it is much easier to deflect unwelcome comments, looks or advances because of the familiarity of the sources and the ability to report them. In contrast, sexual harassment in the field is difficult to deal with, especially if the sources are public officials and security personnel (police, internal security forces and the army). Because these perpetrators are in positions of power and control access to information, most journalists admitted being deterred from talking back or filing complaints against them. They worry that it will limit their access in the field, thereby jeopardizing their current position or opportunities for advancement. Those who are brave enough to file complaints often face indifference and deprecation. When one young journalist called the Interior Minister to file a complaint against a member of the armed forces, she was told the minister “doesn’t have time for such things” and that she should file a complaint at a police station (personal communication, February 14, 2013). But the fact that Lebanese law is void of

any anti-sexual harassment provisions makes it next to impossible to hold such perpetrators accountable. As one reporter recounted:

It's endemic, systemic, and it's everywhere. I can't emphasize enough how many times I've been [verbally and non-verbally] harassed by public officials, and members of the Lebanese police, security and armed forces. But who am I supposed to report it to? The same entities that are supposed to protect you from such harassment are the ones who engage in and perpetuate it. If you try to report it to local authorities, they either ignore you or laugh it off, or even worse, say that you must have invited it upon yourself. (personal communication, September 15, 2012)

Sporadic reports of Lebanese police officers allegedly harassing and—at least in one reported incident—raping women in their custody (Nazzal 2012) further discourage reporting such incidents and reinforces the perception that the supposed protectors are themselves the perpetrators.

As noted, Lebanese law (and press syndicates) does not even mention sexual harassment and most news organizations have no policies against sexual harassment, nor do they take such complaints seriously. In fact, only 22 percent (55) of survey respondents said their companies have anti-sexual harassment policies, and 30 percent (75) said their companies deal effectively with sexual harassment complaints.

Moreover, in such a legally disabling environment, victims of sexual harassment bear the burden of proof and often put their reputations and wellbeing at risk. One veteran reporter recounted her agonizing experience with a male journalist where she used to work. He repeatedly propositioned her for sex, and when she refused his advances, he continued to verbally harass her to the extent of sending company-wide emails claiming that she was promiscuous and had slept with her news sources. She approached her superiors on numerous occasions, but they did not take any action. The harassment only stopped once her fellow co-workers witnessed his behavior first-hand and demanded the newspaper stop assigning him stories.

The same applies to gender discrimination laws and policies. Gender discrimination gets no mention in Lebanese law or in the press syndicates' codes of conduct, and most companies have no explicit policies to fight gender discrimination. It is even worse at the implementation level. Survey results show that although 45 percent (113) of respondents said their companies have gender equality policies, only 25 percent (63) said their companies deal effectively with gender discrimination complaints.

Despite the somewhat low percentage of journalists who reported experiencing sexual harassment—possibly the results of a common bias such sensitive questions face—their overwhelming support for policies that combat gender discrimination and sexual harassment is perhaps more telling. In fact, almost all surveyed participants supported changing the Lebanese penal code to specifically address gender discrimination (97 percent, 240) and sexual harassment (99 percent, 246). Similarly, almost all want companies to adopt specific codes of conduct regarding gender discrimination (96 percent, 237) and sexual harassment (97 percent, 236) and enforce policies on gender discrimination (98 percent, 241) and sexual harassment (95 percent, 235).

Further supporting this notion is female journalists' perception of the severity of gender discrimination and sexual harassment. Table 6 shows that an overwhelming majority of female journalists believe that gender discrimination and sexual harassment

TABLE 6
Perceived effect of gender discrimination and sexual harassment

Percentage of women who believe	% (N)
Sexual harassment is a serious problem for female journalists in Lebanon	88 (210)
Gender discrimination is a serious problem for female journalists in Lebanon	73 (177)
Sexual harassment negatively affects their satisfaction with their job	59 (143)
Gender discrimination negatively affects their satisfaction with their job	62 (149)
Gender discrimination negatively affects female journalists' outlook for advancement	79 (192)
Sexual harassment negatively affects female journalists' outlook for advancement	82 (195)

are serious problems for female journalists in Lebanon and negatively affect female journalists' job satisfaction and their outlook for advancement.

In addition, about 1 in 10 surveyed respondents said they considered quitting their jobs due to gender discrimination (9 percent, 22) or sexual harassment (9 percent, 22). Ironically, these values are almost identical to Gutek's (1985) findings that sexual harassment had caused 10 percent of all women to leave a job.

In-depth interviews revealed that gender discrimination and sexual harassment, as well as their perceived severity, varied depending on the type of news organization (Western/international versus Arab/local outlets). Journalists working at international news organizations believed gender discrimination and sexual harassment were very serious problems in both the workplace and in the field. However, those working at local Lebanese and regional Arab news outlets tended to downplay both, particularly within the newsroom. These discrepancies seem to provide support for the sociocultural model's understanding of gender discrimination and sexual harassment, as both an extension of socially normative sex-roles as well as men's economic power over women in Lebanon. It may also indicate many Lebanese and Arab women's lack of understanding of their own rights and of what constitutes gender discrimination and sexual harassment and their effects on individuals, institutions and society. Partly indicative was the surprise many Lebanese and Arab survey participants displayed when reading the definitions of sexual harassment in the questionnaire, not realizing that all of them fall under sexual harassment. In addition, some respondents even placed emphasis on personal responsibility in combatting gender discrimination and sexual harassment, noting that female journalists must pay careful attention to how they dress and present themselves. Some advised putting on an extra firm and aggressive demeanor when pursuing stories and information in the field. One participant noted, "if you giggle, flirt, act coquette and wear miniskirts to all your interviews, what do you expect will happen?" (personal communication, January 17, 2013).

Still some participants, especially those who experienced gender discrimination and sexual harassment, highlighted the grave impact these had on their lives. For example, one local journalist who faced threatening sexual harassment recounted the emotional trauma she experienced; she underwent intensive psychological therapy, was prescribed anti-depressants, and had to take a prolonged hiatus from work (personal communication, September 7, 2012).

The handful of participants in positions of authority at news organizations in Lebanon were adamant that the most effective way to improve the situation of female journalists in Lebanon is to increase the number of women in decision-making positions.

Almost all interviewees agreed. The journalist quoted above who experienced threatening sexual harassment explained:

In my current position, my superiors are women, and I feel much more comfortable with that arrangement. They are tough and have high expectations, but I also know that if I'm facing a work-related issue I can approach them and actually have my issues addressed and taken seriously, and not worry if they have ulterior motives for agreeing to resolve issues that I am facing. (personal communication, September 7, 2012)

Beyond creating more hospitable working environments and conditions, having more women in senior and decision-making positions offers additional advantages of diversifying news content, giving increased attention to issues affecting women and providing female role models beyond the stereotypes presented in the media today (Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming 2004). However, having women in positions of power requires addressing all the issues raised above, especially changes in the law. However, given the government gridlock Lebanon has been facing for almost a decade, changes in the legal code may be slow.

In the meantime, a seasoned journalist gave the following advice to less-experienced newcomers:

You've got to be tough, develop a thick skin, and work to prove your professionalism and abilities. Young women should understand that, in principle, they have the same rights and expectations as men. But in reality, you'll likely have to work twice as hard and make sacrifices in other parts of your life to get ahead. It's just the nature of the industry and part of the institutional dynamics. Yes, things have changed a lot and are continuing to change, but news is still a man's world. (personal communication, October 2, 2012)

Conclusion

This study set out to examine why female journalists in an Arab country continue to be marginalized. The evidence strongly supports the study's proposition that interacting factors, pertaining to gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and the lack of legally and socially enabling environments, systematically discourage and block women's entry into the news field, push those who made it out of the profession and keep those who have endured siloed in specific roles away from positions of power. The findings support both the sociocultural and the organizational models (McDonald 2012) as explanatory frameworks for gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace, and explain these phenomena as both extensions of socially normative sex-roles (Gutek, Cohen, and Konrad 1990; Gutek and Morasch 1982) and as men's economic power over women within the organization context (Brown and Flatow 1997), but also throughout society (MacKinnon 1979; Zalk 1990). Women journalists in Lebanon lack the legally enabling environment that may help them work toward gender equality and counter the prevalence of sexual harassment and discrimination. Add to this disempowering legal environment a patriarchal society and sexist work and domestic cultures that together exert immense pressures on women's careers and ability to balance work and family. The overall result is a powerful structure that keeps women restricted to a handful of jobs and holds them below the glass ceiling, with the exception of a handful who—thanks to nepotism—have reached the corporate boardrooms, but only with nominal power and ultimately to serve the same

patriarchy that keeps them down. Within this harsh environment, nevertheless, female journalists present a strong sense of resilience and a conviction that despite journalism continuing to be a male-dominated field, matters are improving and women are able to march toward a better status by working doubly hard, developing a stoic personality, and sacrificing on the personal and family fronts. Moreover, most perceived pay-parity as the *status quo* although future research should establish whether this is a fact or an illusion. Finally, if this is the situation in arguably the most open, liberal and free Arab country, one can speculate that women journalists in the rest of the Arab world face even worse circumstances. Further country-specific research will be needed to confirm this matter and highlight the main culprits and the most salient hurdles.

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NOTES

1. Murr TV, Al Jadeed, LBCI, Future TV, Al Manar, Al Mayadeen, Tele Liban, Tele Lumiere, Orange TV, NBN and ANB.
2. Sawt el Ghad, Sawt Loubnan, Sawt el Shaab, El Sharq, El Nour, Delta, Fajr and Sawt el-Hurriyet.
3. *The Daily Star*, *Al-Mustaqbal*, *Al Akhbar*, *Assafir*, *L'Orient le Jour*, *Al Anwar*, *Al Balad*, *Al Binaa*, *Al Hayat*, *Al Liwaa*, *Al Sharq*, *Al Sharq al Awsat*, *Al Jourhouria* and *Al Nahar*.
4. *Arab Ad*, *Al Hasnaa*, *Elle*, *L'Hebdo*, *Noun*, *Sayidaty*, *The Federation* and *Commerce du Levant*.
5. NOW Lebanon, Al Akhbar English, Al Akhbar Arabic, LBC, Tayyar, eNashra, Al-Manar, Beirut.com, e-news, Al Mofakira al Kanouniya, Falasteen Alyoum, Slab news and Al-Modon.
6. Lebanese national news agency, German news agency, Agence France-Presse, Associated Press, Reuters, United Press International, Anadol news agency and Taqreeb news agency.
7. CNN, BBC, Al Arabiya, Al Sumaria, Al Iraqiya, Al Hurra, Sky News, Washington Post, Asia TV, Bloomberg, CNBC Arabia, Daily Telegraph, De Persdienst Netherlands, Al Jazeera Arabic, Al Resalah, Al Mar'a al Arabiya, MBC and Al Jazeera English.
8. This ubiquitous form of slavery generates many other problems for women in Lebanese society, especially that almost all these domestic workers are women.
9. A politician who controls the TV station.
10. The main person in control of the station.
11. A former prime minister who controlled the station. After his assassination in 2005, his son took control.
12. A politician and businessman who controls the TV station.
13. Ownership registration and stockholder records of these companies were acquired and analyzed.

14. It is significant to note that Al-Jadeed TV, unlike most other stations, is predominantly staffed with female executives, including one of the only TV news directors in Arab TV—who does not have familial connections to the male owner.

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