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On Being a Good Worker, a Good Mother, a Good Carer: Women Journalists, Motherhood, and Caregiving

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationship between journalism, caregiving, and family-building, focusing on women journalists in Portugal. Drawing on a critical thematic analysis of thirty interviews, it explores an analytic framework that includes cultural, structural, and agentic dimensions of career limitations, organised in three overarching themes. The first examines how women journalists experience work constraints stemming from traditional cultural ideals where women are still the main caregivers and work cultures that perpetuate a male perspective on professional routines. The second theme explores the mismatch between work and care responsibilities that arises from prevailing family structures and work processes. The third theme centres on how women journalists respond to constraints by making choices and developing strategies. Journalists' reflexive deliberations about career decisions, employment conditions, family life and cultural assumptions underpinning parenthood demonstrate the complex interrelationship between cultural and working structures, organisational materiality, and agency. Together, these dimensions replicate patterns that make journalism more inhospitable for women. A central point in this research is that while a systemic gender bias exists beyond the sector, workplace inequalities are particularly consequential for journalism and democracy.

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Introduction

Diversity and gender balance in newsrooms have been on the agenda for journalism research and policies in recent decades. Still, one group seems largely ignored: mothers and/or those with family responsibilities. Yet, in line with research in other work domains, journalism studies have long documented that experiences of professional activity, career choices and progression, and work-family articulation have a higher toll on women (Byerly 2011; Franks 2013; North 2016, 2009a, 2009b; Tijani-Adenle 2021). Research further draws attention to the overlooked conundrum that underpins

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integrating motherhood and employment: women struggle with a sense of acute division when attempting to reconcile the two worlds, suggesting a perceived incompatibility between motherhood and journalism, as the job tends to demand total availability (De Vuyst and Raeymaeckers 2019).

In many newsrooms, women are forced out by unsympathetic management and unfeasible schedules. The highly contradictory demands on women in public and private life can exclude them from journalism. When studying the audio-visual industries, Liddy and O'Brien (2021) observed that motherhood is often used as the single explanatory variable to account for women's under-representation in this sector, but there is no simple or direct reason why women "opt" to leave work. Although this inequality is felt in other areas of work, for journalism, it further raises the problem of representativity in the newsrooms, particularly in editorial and managerial roles, likely extending to less diversity in news content (Shor, Van de Rijt, and Miltsov 2019) and contributes to "the ongoing secondary status of women's participation as citizens" (Ross and Carter 2011, 1148).

The media sector is still built upon rigid gender structures and resistance to change (Shor, Van de Rijt, and Miltsov 2019), as seen in the long-lasting inequalities of the glass ceiling and the pay gap between male and female journalists. Further, the conflict between family, work responsibilities and career prospects is deterring women from deciding to have a family, tone down their ambitions, or even leading them to give up their careers (Elmore 2009). Family responsibilities often determine whether women reach higher-level positions, and the few who get these are far more likely than men to be childless (Franks 2013). The situation has deteriorated with the pandemic, with increased domestic chores loaded on female journalists (Liddy and O'Brien 2021; Wreyford et al. 2021). These issues should be revisited in the aftermath of the health crisis, considering how career aspirations impact family planning choices, bearing children or choosing not to have them, as part of the problem of gender inequality in journalism, which, as De Vuyst and Raeymaeckers (2019) have put it, is a "multi-layered issue".

We approach these multilayers with a focus on women, motherhood, caregiving, and work, which need not only to be analysed considering the complex, diverse realities of women's lives but also considering how their experiences and actions are embedded within and across intersecting dimensions. Thus, we aim to identify the linkages between the organisational, cultural, and subjective dimensions of inequality, underscoring the importance of understanding how multiple factors are produced and reproduced in the newsroom and shape the experiences of balancing family and job responsibilities.

We focus on women, who are often disproportionately responsible for securing care work. Further, we take O'Hagan's (2018, 1) view that "maternity is a valid category for intersectional analysis, for when women become mothers, they experience inequalities in families because of their gender, undertaking the greater proportion of housework, childcare and household labour". However, we are not interested solely in "mothers" as we aim to explore how all women are impacted by social and cultural constructions and expectations of motherhood, whether they are mothers or not. As Katherine Goldstein (2017, 29) has put it, "It's not just birth mothers who need better support in the workplace. Fathers and non-birth parents, people caring for ageing parents, and even those without family responsibilities can also benefit greatly from progressive family policies and supportive work cultures". However, she continues, "the news industry and society at large don't have the same systemic problem retaining and promoting talented men

after they have children” (idem). Furthermore, for women, the glass ceiling is primarily held by maternal walls.

We use the term “family” broadly, including couples with or without children, single-parent families, and reconstituted families, i.e., families in their diversity of structures and dynamics. Also, in this article, caregiving refers to non-paid work that a journalist provides to a family member or someone who cannot do so for themselves. We are inspired by feminist ethics of care, which emphasises the value of people’s relationships and the universality of human dependence on others (Gilligan 1982; Held 2006).

The paper focuses on women journalists in Portugal. Combining the literature on gendered organisations and journalism, we address the following questions: What perceptions and experiences do women journalists have regarding newswork shaping their life courses and career opportunities? What do their responses reveal about how gender, work, and motherhood ideals impact their experience of the newsroom and caregiving needs? The following sections discuss the Portuguese context, including workplace policies and culture, and establish our theoretical interest in the field of women journalists’ career determinants, focusing on the intersection between the work-family interface and career decisions.

Parenthood and Care in the Portuguese Context

In the last five decades, Portugal has seen significant social transformations in women’s participation in employment and education, becoming a unique case of women’s presence in the labour market. Like in other European Union (EU) countries, women are now marrying later (or not at all), having children later and having fewer children. However, unlike other member states, the country shows a high rate of female employment and the prevalence of the dual-earner model with two family members in full-time employment (Marques, Casaca, and Arcanjo 2021). The country has further developed progressive legislation oriented towards equal rights for women and men, the equal valuation of motherhood and fatherhood and the improvement of the conditions of articulation between family and work (Amâncio and Correia 2019). Portuguese legislation is inspired by most EU laws regarding maternity, paternity, and care protection. Still, employability trends and working conditions show gendered labour patterns, as work interruption after childbirth is most common among women, and part-time employment is a female-dominated working time arrangement (Marques, Casaca, and Arcanjo 2021).

The concept of motherhood has deeply changed since the dictatorship years when a pro-natalist, traditionalist ideology persisted (SIRC 2012). In the 1970s and 80s, women joined the labour market in high numbers, which, however, was not followed by the creation of adequate support structures (e.g., nurseries) or incentives for male participation in unpaid work. Today, the role of mothers remains mostly unchanged, and there is evidence of continuing gender asymmetries in family practices and unequal household task distribution, especially between dual-career couples (Amâncio and Correia 2019). These inequalities in women’s and men’s family roles can be explained by dominant gender norms in society that still sustain women’s traditional role in most household and child-care tasks.

More recent encouragement to male participation in family life (mainly by expanding parental leave) has transformed the attitudes towards fatherhood and male participation

in childcare (Wall and Leitão 2017). A shift towards more equal sharing of paid and unpaid work encourages the adoption of the dual-earner/dual-carer model (Ramos, Rodrigues, and Correia 2019). Yet, Portuguese women are still primarily responsible for care work, regardless of their maternal status. Catholic Church, tradition and even the media encourage the ideal of the “good mother” and of the “intensive motherhood” model (César, Oliveira, and Fontaine 2018), assuming the centrality of the child and the prevalence of the child’s interests over those of the mother, who must be entirely involved in this role (Hays 1996). Like other Southern European countries, Portugal cultivates a strong ideological commitment to the family. Still, it is also characterised by a “specific double bind (or ambivalence) in culture and policy, underlining the importance of family commitments as well as new trends in families and family policies” (Ramos et al. 2018, 27).

Despite the progressive legislation, women carry the lion’s share of child-caring responsibilities while also keeping full-time work, so “the burden on women in this respect is still much higher than the burden on men, with inevitable consequences for women’s careers, pay, etc.” (European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, and Ramalho 2024, 58). This situation often means women must rely on extended family, external and paid-for support or simply become busier (SIRC 2012). Further, these dominant gender norms highlight a traditional career role for women and contribute to contradictory and blaming attitudes towards their participation in the public sphere (Ramos, Rodrigues, and Correia 2019). Two contrasting ideas coexist: while women are still expected to be “naturally” better in the domestic and emotional spheres, mothers are under increasing pressure to excel in professional contexts (SIRC 2012).

Little data is available on these issues in journalism, where women journalists comprise 41% of the workforce in Portugal (CCPJ 2024). Previous national and international research on women and journalism does, however, provide relevant clues to help us design a conceptual framework to analyse and discuss our exploratory results that can then be tested in other national contexts.

Women Journalists in the Gendered Workplace

Alongside intersecting work-related obstacles, including those based on gender, race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation or social class, women journalists encounter various other gendered barriers (e.g., gendered stereotypes that may dictate different beats or limit women’s access to leadership roles). In feminist media studies, a rich body of research explored the workings of newsrooms as gendered organisations (e.g., North 2009b; O’Brien 2019; Silveirinha, Lobo, and Simões 2023; Topić and Bruegmann 2021).

The literature also shows critical insights into inequalities in the workplace, namely on the tensions between work demands, the invisibility of care and the relational expectations placed on women. As journalism often requires lengthy and nontraditional work schedules, it easily blurs the boundaries between different domains of life (Bossio and Holton 2021; Snyder, Johnson, and Kozimor-King 2021), which is intensified by precariousness in the sector (Lukan and Čehovin Zajc 2023).

North’s (2016) survey of female journalists in Australia exposed a “systemic gender bias that disadvantages women, particularly mothers” (315). The study found women journalists perceived gender bias around options of promotional opportunities, identifying their

childrearing responsibilities as constraints to career development and also as a matter of personal choice. Both perspectives distract journalists from discussing the associated penalties as an organisational “obligation to equity policies” (327). This idea should be read against a background of global industry change and the effects of neoliberalism, such as the intensification of work production (North 2009a). These findings have been replicated in different media industries across different countries (Liddy and O’Brien 2021), demonstrating that the same issues raised by North’s research still prevail despite cultural variability in parenting practices and parental/caregiving policies.

Further, the global impact of technology and neoliberal ideology on news work and parenting contribute to these widespread practices. For example, women in Nigeria are discriminated against in broadcast journalism in the early days of maternity leave and are sidelined in ways that affect their career progression, sometimes resulting in them leaving the industry (Tijani-Adenle 2021). In Italy, women journalists still struggle between being mothers and television professionals (Gavrila 2023). In the USA, women working in print and television newsrooms believe digital technology hampered balancing work and family life (Snyder, Johnson, and Kozimor-King 2021). Systemic gender bias prevails in Slovenia, particularly for mothers who internalise they cannot have careers and achieve the best results at work (Pajnik and Hrženjak 2022). In India, women journalists experience more family-to-work conflict in all life stages than men journalists (Bhalla and Kang 2019). Women are only considered “good reporters” if they prioritise work over family, reinforcing the post-feminist myth that women can “have it all” and silencing the need to address issues structurally (Kanagasabai 2016). These ideas are part of a broader neoliberal work ethic, which encourages the “voluntary” relinquishing of “benefits” connected to maternity and childcare.

Also noting the silences about women’s needs, Aust (2021) explored the status of non-motherhood and some of the specificities of gendered expectations of the non-maternal within the British televisual field. She argues that “the turn to care” is incomplete: “rendering unspeakable the care needed by women who do not have children is a failure of the television industry. Care accommodations by definition must include all needs.” (123).

Particularly relevant to this paper is the research by Lobo et al. (2017), which documented the conflicting roles of Portuguese women journalists as caretakers and committed professionals and how “in their daily struggle to ‘have it all’, women often adopt survival strategies which include the anticipation and negotiation of schedules, stories or tasks” (1159). An interview-based study of women who reached top leadership positions in the Portuguese print press found that managerial ambitions are still a male privilege, as there were only four women top leaders (Cunha and Martins 2023). Despite the low number, these women leaders recognised a degree of advantage towards other women for either not having children or having a strong family and financial support.

The literature highlights a growing congruence across newsrooms in different cultures. The following section aims to develop an analytic framework to approach the various layers of inequality in journalism.

(Re)Producing Inequality in News Work: An Analytic Framework

The previous sections highlighted elements of the prevailing belief systems and social attitudes that affect women journalists’ occupational choices and career aspirations at

the cultural and organisational levels. Newsroom inequality is further fuelled by the gendered division of beats, the highly burdensome work, and policies that privilege individuals without primary childcare responsibilities (Hardin and Whiteside 2009). Further, the time-demanding nature of news work, allied with the widespread instability and pervasive job insecurity in the sector, results in harmful gender practices that affect women in particular. There is an idealised norm of what a journalist is as a professional who is always available, with no limitations. For Shani Orgad (2019, 29), these are toxic practices that are “further gendered by ideas of personal freedom, choice, individualism, and agency [that] increasingly animate the debate on and construction of women, family, and work”. Past research provides important answers on the women-family-work interception where gender inequality is built.

At the organisational level, one central mechanism of gender inequality is the “ideal worker” (Williams 2001) norm and its presupposed “separate spheres” ideology. The “ideal worker” is always available for work, single-mindedly devoted to the job, shows few disruptions from family, and can rely on someone else for caregiving responsibilities. Women are less likely to be perceived as ideal workers, given the enduring ideology of separate spheres and traditional work-family arrangements. The “ideal worker” notion is also strongly linked to the conscious and unconscious presumptions about women and motherhood. These presumptions, coined as “motherhood penalties” (Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007), lead to biases about women’s commitment to their occupations. Furthermore, normative expectations of motherhood often collide with beliefs about “good workers”, as mothers are expected to prioritise their children above paid work (Hays 1996). Both notions of “ideal worker” and “good mother” perpetuate gendered inequalities and create regimes of disadvantage not only for mothers but also for childless women: organisations may anticipate younger journalists as future mothers and delay their progression or, in the case of older women, employers foster constant availability and extended hours as ultimately yielding status and rewards.

The work-life balance (WLB) concept also frames these inequalities at the organisational level. Usually referring to time management, the scholarship on WLB has a long legacy exploring the strategies and tactics that working individuals (primarily women) use to manage different roles. Across various domains, the crafting of balance, research shows, remains a gendered struggle with a heavy toll on women (e.g., Marques, Casaca, and Arcanjo 2021).

In journalism and media studies, research has identified the tensions between ideals of work and personal life can induce personal feelings of angst, guilt and failure experienced particularly by senior female managers and professionals when they cannot attain the “right” balance (Orgad 2019). However, rather than being understood simply as an individualistic result of pressure or leading to a simple equation of “choice” of other alternatives, these feelings must be understood as interlocked in broader ideologies. Rottenberg (2019), for example, argues that the “happy work-family balance” is currently being (re)presented as a progressive feminist ideal – a variant of neoliberal feminism “predicated on crafting a felicitous work-family balance” (3).

These theoretical insights illuminated an analytic framework for our research, further inspired by sociologist Julia Evetts’ (2000) analysis of change in women’s careers. She identified three explanatory theories of these changes: cultural, structural and action dimensions. Given our specific interest in journalism as a profession, we apply these dimensions to women journalists in the following analytic framework: *Cultural*

Dimensions: relate to cultural norms and values shaping journalists' cues about their identities as women (e.g., responses to feminine ideologies and normative expectations as journalists) as well as to the news industry-specific working environment; *Structural Dimensions*: encompass both the family and work structures (e.g., how work tasks and responsibilities are divided up between family members as well as journalism organisational processes such as promotion ladders, hierarchies and news work practices); *Action Dimensions*: refer to women's agentic responses to barriers when facing intersecting identities as journalists and as women to whom care is largely assigned (e.g., individual career decisions and strategies of coping with work and caring responsibilities).

Although these elements are analytically distinct, they are mutually constitutive and difficult to disentangle in practice. Thus, we identify them as they coalesce along the thematic patterns emerging from our dataset.

Methodology

The study was set in a framework of a qualitative methodology, within which we gathered information not only on the factual nature of the practices but also related to their subjective dimensions. The research draws on thirty semi-structured interviews with female journalists. This sample was gathered purposefully and snowballed. Journalists were formally contacted via email or phone, and interviews took place in two moments (January–February 2022 and May–June 2023), lasting 60–90 min. Oral consent and permission to record the conversations in video and audio were obtained before each interview.

The semi-directive interview was used, having been based on a set of open and flexible guiding questions, which allowed participants to develop key points and interviewers to follow up on specific questions. Participants were not asked about their personal decisions or life situations. They were free to do so if they wished. We did not ask if they were caregivers or if they had or were planning to have children, and we did not add this variant to the participants' description. Instead, we asked: *Do you think that family life is compatible with the profession of a journalist?* Some interviewees illustrated their answers with personal anecdotal information, while others kept their opinions generalised, bringing equally insightful views.

Participants worked in print/online ($n = 18$), news agencies ($n = 1$), broadcast ($n = 5$) and digital-only newsrooms ($n = 6$), both as affiliated with media companies ($n = 22$) and as freelancers ($n = 8$). They worked across different news beats, and some ($n = 7$) had editorial or management functions. Their ages ranged from 24 to 61 years (average: 41.33), and their working experience across the media spectrum from 4 to 35 years (average: 17.63 years), as [Table 1](#) shows,

All interviews were conducted in Portuguese, and participants were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy. Interviews were digitally voice-recorded; the transcriptions were thematically analysed with the help of qualitative software, and the authors translated the citations into English. Codes were derived from the literature and our research question, aiming to address the multilayered inequality with a focus on women journalists, care, and work: how they manage their professional and gender identities, make career and family decisions, and assess obstacles and enablers. Through a critical thematic analysis, which encourages "a critical reading of interview data that asks why and how communication codes are recurrent, repeating, and forceful in ways that reproduce and reinforce social

Table 1. Participant's profiles.

ParticipantID	Pseudonym	Medium	Position	Age	Working Experience (years)
R1	Mafalda	Television	Reporter	46	25
R2	Fernanda	Print/Online	Reporter	24	4
R3	Isabel	Print/Online	Senior Reporter	61	35
R4	Helena	Television	Editor	48	25
R5	Filomena	Radio	Editor	37	15
R6	Margarida	News Agency	Reporter	39	12
R7	Rita	Print/Online	Reporter	26	6
R8	Teresa	Print/Online	Freelancer	47	13
R9	Filipa	Online	Freelancer	33	8
R10	Catarina	Online	Editor	34	13
R11	Joana	Print/Online	Reporter	30	9
R12	Luísa	Local Press	Director	38	12
R13	Carla	Online	Senior Reporter	29	7
R14	Rosa	Print/Online	Reporter	44	25
R15	Paula	Local Press	Reporter	45	22
R16	Patrícia	Local Press	Director	48	26
R17	Sofia	Print/Online	Reporter	55	21
R18	Conceição	Print/Online	Reporter	31	8
R19	Carmen	Print/Online	Senior reporter	53	32
R20	Sílvia	Online	Reporter	40	10
R21	Eduarda	Online	Freelancer	43	18
R22	Lúcia	Television	Correspondent	39	18
R23	Lídia	Local Press	Editor In Chief	50	28
R24	Mariana	Online	Reporter	24	4
R25	Celeste	Television	Editor in Chief	44	26
R26	Júlia	Print/Online	Freelancer	30	8
R27	Clara	Print/Online	Freelancer	57	31
R28	Manuela	Print/Online	Freelancer	52	23
R29	Raquel	Print/Online	Freelancer	50	25
R30	Tânia	Print/Online	Freelancer	43	20

inequalities" (Lawless and Chen 2019, 95), we sought to identify the links between the organisational, cultural and subjective dimensions of inequality, emphasising the importance of understanding how multiple inequality factors are (re)produced in journalism.

The thematic analysis ensured coding consistency across interviews and an in-depth engagement with the transcripts. We took a generally inductive approach, building the coding scheme around the identified themes. A feminist approach to the analysis foregrounded issues of power and dominance and underpinned engagement with participants' viewpoints. The remainder of this paper will follow the structure of this thematic analysis, focusing on the multilayers of inequality that shape women journalists' careers and life paths. Quotes were edited for clarity.

Findings

The literature review identified interrelated dimensions of inequality in women's career paths that interfere with women journalists' work and life experiences. In what follows, we analyse how they expressed these dimensions around three themes that encapsulated the factual character of both beliefs and practices as related to cultural ideals of femininity and family, as well as work demands and cultural ideals (theme one), promoted and perpetuated at the structural level of forms and patterns in both the family and the work organisation (theme two) and shaping journalists' subjective experiences of inequality as lived by individual women, demanding different strategies by them (theme three).

Theme 1: On Being “a Good Journalist, a Good Wife, a Good Mother”

This theme captured how women journalists experience inequality from cultural ideals and work cultures. As explored in the literature review, societal attitudes towards working women often reinforce traditional gender roles that assume women bear the primary responsibility for caring. In the words of the interviewees:

It's not just maternity leave ... The whole life of that child is very much based on women, in societal terms. It's the mother who gives her phone number in school in case something happens to the kid; if the kid has to go to the hospital, they call the mother. It is the mother who goes to medical appointments. This is more or less rooted in society ... It happens to be very much on the shoulders of women, and indirectly, this will affect them at work. Journalism is a very demanding profession in terms of availability. (Rita)

This is a cultural thing ... so intrinsic to our culture. I don't know how it is in other countries if it's like that too if women feel they have to do everything, take care of everything, cover everything, carry everything. They have to carry the whole weight. (Paula)

Women are perceived, and perceive themselves, as having the prime responsibility for the support and the care of family members. This perception is a key element sustaining the structural determinants of and constraints to women's careers, explained by historical and cultural reasons, as seen earlier. Still, when these notions interact with prevailing ideals of masculinity and with work demands, the impact on women's experiences in newsrooms is clear:

they asked a colleague who had missed [work] to go with his son to the hospital: “Have you not got a wife at home?” A [male] boss asks a journalist: - “But don't you have a wife? Let your wife take the child, right?” - and I found it a killer statement. I didn't know you could say that sentence in [organisation name], but apparently, you still can. (Margarida)

I never heard anyone ask my [male] colleagues who their child stayed with. And they ask me: “So? Who's looking after your daughter?” Nobody asks a male colleague that. As if the father was less missed by a baby. “So, you came in at 5 am and your daughter is okay?” (Filomena)

Here, interviewees express their experiences of blunt forms of sexism, which also brings to the fore what Gill argued when researching new media work: one of how sexism operates is through the “invalidation and annihilation of any language for talking about structural inequalities” (Gill 2011, 13). Moreover, in a post-feminist climate where equality is assumed, sexism's “unspeakability” helps to “produce sites in which discrimination flourishes” (62), as they obscure inequalities such as sexism itself.

The above quotes also reveal embedded discriminatory discourses by employers that replicate a normalised male perspective to professional routines and hegemonic masculinity that continues to shape news newsroom culture and the culture of management (North 2016), even in situations where managers are women, as stressed by this journalist,

Some of the women whom I saw following higher leadership paths became masculinised. They started to behave almost like men, or not having a family, or being authoritarian. (Lídia)

It is important to consider the existing working cultures in journalism, especially given the economic stress and precariousness prevalent in the industry. Precariousness and pay-related issues foster toxic working practices which, despite the laws protecting maternity, paternity and care adopted by news organisations (Rosário Palma Ramalho 2024),

aggravate gender disparities (Orgad 2019). As Evetts found in the engineering and science sectors, an individualistic and competitive culture is seen as the path to success, and women who aspire to be promoted will have to adhere to those expectations and learn to “manage the cultural dilemmas they entail for women, if they wish to succeed” (Evetts 2000, 60). This is replicated in journalism:

I've been putting off motherhood because there's always something going on that I think I must keep up one hundred per cent. I am at a stage where I feel I still need to prioritise my career. There are many things I don't do with my partner because I need to be professionally present. That is what the newspaper expects from me. And that has affected our relationship. (Joana)

... [motherhood] is postponed and, well, never happens, precisely because they want to do things at a professional level, and don't want to be absent mothers ... It is very difficult to reconcile motherhood with a demanding professional life and leadership positions if that aspiration exists ... (Euarda)

I'm at the point of thinking about starting a family ... I'm particularly sensitive to the effects it will have from a career point of view ... I think it's a big problem, and it's been an issue for me. (Filipa)

Cultural dimensions, therefore, emphasise the difficulties and the determinants of women's career choices, as well as the continuation and reproduction of gender differences (Evetts 2000) in women's career achievements, as argued by this journalist:

That's why we have more male commentators on television ... why we have male journalists, with more availability; and male journalists earning more because they had more time to pursue their careers. With the pandemic, this became evident. (Fernanda)

Theme 2: The Mismatch Between Work and Family Demands and the Support Needed to Meet Them

Several responses documented the structural dimensions of inequality related to prevailing family structures and work processes. Most journalists acknowledge the latter as being specific to news work in its current form and to the news industry, which also lacks the ability to support workers with caring needs, as these women acknowledge,

Unlike other professional areas, where perhaps the person is just in front of an Excel sheet that, if not finished today, can be done tomorrow ... journalism won't allow that ... Starting a family or taking care of others - mostly tasks that end up being the responsibility of women - ends up having an impact. And unfortunately, the industry does not have the necessary infrastructure to support those with these needs. (Filipa)

... nobody will have a child if they don't know what time they will finish work and at what time they can be with them. So, we either hire more professionals ... or we must stop this model of fast journalism and give specific schedules to people who currently don't have them. (Mariana)

How is this management [balancing work and family] done if the journalist has to be permanently connected to the world to do the job? And how does that fit in with the family? ... It's almost an impossible balance to achieve. Maybe that's why so many [women] journalists are childless, right?. (Patricia)

The context in which women journalists make career decisions is shaped by a combination of structural dimensions of family and organisation processes, which affect the

career trajectories of women and men journalists differently. These journalists mention the managerial disappointment when the concept of the “ideal worker” is not met:

... one says: “I have to pick up my son from school”, “I can’t work until late” or “I can’t go out now in a report”, and this is seen as an affront, as a lack of dedication, as a lack of professionalism ... And they make us feel like lesser professionals, simply because I don’t have an alternative for someone to pick my son up from school. (Helena)

One of the interviewed journalists reflected on how, at times, she felt discriminated against for not having children. The quote shows how the organisational understanding of sparing professionals with caring responsibilities is then at a cost for other workers and not a viable solution as such,

When I spent eight years covering Arts and Culture, I was the one who travelled the most because I didn’t have children. I could go to concerts at night or film interviews or whatever because I didn’t have children, right? And that ... ended up being a little discriminatory ... It was almost unfair. I wouldn’t be better paid for that, but it was always me because the others couldn’t because they had children. (Lúcia)

This quote brings to the fore a needed ethics of care (Gilligan 1982; Held 2006) at the organisational level in newsrooms. A caring and ethical organisation privileges the workplace as

horizontal rather than hierarchical, flexible and rotating rather than bureaucratic and rigid, granting agency and humanity to employees rather than objectifying or subordinating them, and blurring conventional boundaries between the personal and political, including with policies that support active parenting and fair wages. (Steiner 2021, 202).

Interviewees also mentioned situations of sacrifice. Isabel, a senior journalist, remembered abdicating her right to workload reduction for breastfeeding, and Helena, a sports journalist, who was absent from important family events throughout her career:

I didn’t even use that [time] for breastfeeding because I was starting a job at a newspaper ... it was hard for me to say ... look, I want two hours for breastfeeding. But this happened for my second son as well. (Isabel)

In sports, by definition, we work on weekends ... So I have no idea how many family dinners and birthdays or important things I missed ... I don’t think they can ask us for more ... (Helena)

Structural aspects, however, touch not only the realms of family and work but also the very personal domain of rest and self-care, as seen in this quote:

After they fall asleep ... the night shift starts, right? I work until late and, to play my role as a mother, I then sacrifice my rest time, my hours of sleep ... other things. I sacrifice leisure ... physical exercise ... something has to give ... I came to the conclusion that those few minutes I have a day to spend with him [son] are more important. (Patrícia)

Some journalists, on the other hand, see these structural constraints as common to all professions and tend to focus on the ability to strive for balance as a continuous individual effort,

It’s a big challenge to keep a family when there are no regular hours when there is a very high professional demand, but it’s not an exclusive problem of journalism ... I try to make the two things compatible: family and professional life. If both are important, you keep trying. (Sílvia)

Although recognising structural elements, these views tend to ignore the operation of power in affecting working women with caring responsibilities, particularly in the

context of journalism work. Also, placing the problem at the individual level does not explain how inequalities are embedded in the social structural system, and isolates them from the necessary systematic changes that require individual effort combined with external support from families, organisations and policies.

Theme 3: Facing Choices and Developing Strategies

This theme underlines how the interviewees' careers are perceived as not entirely shaped by cultural and structural forces but also by factors they experience and to which they have to respond. It explores how their actions or agency interpretations affect their career trajectories. In Evetts' words (2000, 63), "cultures and structures are experienced; individuals respond and react in diverse ways; people construct their own meanings, make choices and develop strategies".

For women journalists, these strategies often involve hefty financial resources, personal networks of support, their own professional stability, or negotiations with the co-parent, in some cases meaning they accept to relinquish their careers to support the women journalist partner and become the primary carer, as these quotes illustrate,

Combining [job and childcare] is always difficult ... Always outsourcing: we hire a nursery, and we hire babysitters so we can do our profession outside of normal hours. (Margarida)

... when they were little, instead of going to nursery, they were with nannies ... That way, I could manage according to my schedule ... Probably if I hadn't been the editor, with a more or less acceptable salary, I couldn't have made this kind of move, could I? (Sofia)

It was assumed from the beginning with my partner ... that I wouldn't stop doing anything professionally because I was a mother. That support is essential; otherwise, I would have missed a lot of trains [opportunities]. (Filomena)

Choices are made, and constraints are managed in different ways, namely by adaptation, manipulation, negotiation, resistance or confrontation (Evetts 2000). This citation implies a form of resistance triggered by the gendered nature of the management needed when making family-building decisions,

That decision for us [women] is always more difficult. If we want to have children, we must know that we will give up a little bit of our career ... I haven't had children yet. I hope to have one soon, but I haven't yet, precisely because my professional career is ascending, and I know that if I stop now, I can be penalised. For us, the choice to start a family is always a much tougher choice than for a man because [for] a man, it doesn't imply any stopping, does it? For us, it does. It's already so hard for us to reach a certain position, and a child shouldn't be an obstacle, but it ends up being one. (Conceição)

In other cases, adapting may mean losing opportunities or taking different career paths. The time flexibility and independence from a three-decades-long career as a freelancer were, for Clara, what allowed her to manage a career and raise her four children (three of them as a single mother). However, the lack of a work contract always brought her financial uncertainty. She rejected a chance to have a permanent job, as she would have to relocate. Reflecting on this, she says:

It was a great opportunity. But when it happened, my children were small. I had no family in [the city], and I would need to work in shifts ... So I had no conditions there - the salary wasn't

enough to cover childcare for working the night shifts, for example ... I could have had a different career ... (Clara)

Choices and decisions will also vary over time and in different contexts, as seen in the words of this senior journalist:

When there was the crisis in Venezuela, I couldn't go there. I said - if you can't tell me when I get to come back ... thanks a lot, but I cannot go. And then the Olympic Games in Brazil. I couldn't go either, because they happened on my son's birthday ... With age, we relativise things, and in fact, I had already done so much that I no longer had to prove anything to others or myself. (Celeste)

All interviewed journalists developed individual and personal strategies to navigate the cultural and structural constraints in their work and their lives in ways that took into account cultural and structural factors seen by them as particular to journalism:

It is complicated management, and as a woman, there is always that requirement of a good journalist, a good wife, a good mother, everything and more ... with the pandemic, I stressed a lot ... Giving support to the whole family, continuing to work with the same level of demand. I had to stop and take a breath and decide that I couldn't be super everything ... But that's how it is, for a woman journalist, is difficult. (Carmen)

One journalist sums up what is at stake for women and for journalism itself:

I never wanted to have children, and I'm glad because I don't know how people manage ... I find it very difficult, and I see many people very distressed and above all, I think it continues to fall on women a lot. Even if they try to have some parity in task division, I still see my female colleagues rushing to get their children to do things with them more often than our male colleagues ... I think it's making the environment terrible because ... I mean, we should be as diverse as possible! (Rosa)

Conclusion

Over twenty years ago, Evetts (2000) wrote that internal labour markets and career opportunities are created through the occupational culture of a particular work environment combined with the acceptance of certain procedures and processes. From this, she suggested that "A gendered internal labour market is formed when a career structure emerges whereby some members (e.g., men) can progress and achieve promotion in the career whereas others (e.g., women) are left in practitioner/occupational positions" (2000, 62).

In this article, we aimed to extend prior research that established that career obstacles for women journalists are anchored in culture, patriarchal norms and practices that assert gendered hierarchies. What remained relatively under-researched, however, is how patriarchal structures, and social, cultural and work constraints shape individual decisions of the personal and professional lives of women, forming a "gendered internal labour market" (Evetts 2000, 62) in the news media sector.

The research illuminated this particular aspect of journalism as a profession for women. It identified different layers of inequality, such as the "good mother" and the "ideal worker" (Williams 2001) ideologies and other social and cultural processes such as the "motherhood penalties" (Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007) that impede efforts to confront inequality in ways that foster and value women's presence in the newsroom. The analysis

of interviews with thirty women journalists in different life and career stages revealed not only the cultural assumption about gender roles in caring (Marques, Casaca, and Arcanjo 2021; Ramos et al. 2018) but also two experiences generally experienced amongst them: when considering issues of motherhood, family life or caregiving in general, journalism work poses specific challenges to women who have to navigate between traditional roles in the private, unpaid realm and job performance; and that news workplace culture is hardly supportive of women's needs in the balance of the two spheres. This idea is in line with previous research on similar issues as cited above in this paper (Aust 2021; Bhalla and Kang 2019; Gavrilă 2023; Liddy and O'Brien 2021; Lobo et al. 2017; North 2009a; Pajnik and Hrženjak 2022; Snyder, Johnson, and Kozimor-King 2021; Tijani-Adenle 2021), but it is also shaped by the ambivalence of national culture and policies on the WLF (Amâncio and Correia 2019; Wall and Leitão 2017). Moreover, journalism's expectations of the "good worker" in dealing with highly demanding availability combined with traditional gender roles in the private sphere enhance common feelings of gender inequality in the newsroom.

The analytic framework further revealed the interrelated dimensions of this inequality as expressed in three themes, showing the multiple aspects to be considered when defining the axes on which measures can be drawn to improve journalists' career prospects, rights and well-being. Across the three themes, participants have reiterated the importance of building better conditions for women working in the industry. Women's traditional role as primary caregivers in the household is deeply embedded in social structures and one of the most significant factors underlying gender inequalities in journalism and beyond.

Both structural and cultural dimensions revealed constraints in women's careers, such as the difficulties of organisational and professional structures and the cultural belief systems of family and femininity. The analysis of the individual dimension showed how women will manage such constraints in different ways. Still, the research also revealed how interviewees strongly experience the role played by cultural attitudes – including the stereotypical mindset that women should be mothers, ignoring that not all women aspire to motherhood – and employer practices in limiting the opportunities and choices available to them. The national case also highlights how the all-important laws in the workplace may not be sufficient to improve equal opportunities. However, as Julia Evetts (2000, 65) says, "when women's career actions and expectations change, and changes are also occurring in career structures in organisations and families, then changes in career cultures will eventually follow".

Our work had limitations, including the fact that most interviewees were in their mid-life career stages. Therefore, this study is only generalisable to some of the Portuguese population of newsroom employees. Still, these qualitative insights illuminate the significance of gender as a modifier in experiences of career management and expectations in journalism when impacted by caring responsibility or family-building decisions. The interviews reflect a snapshot of views on the issues at hand at a given moment in time. Additionally, and as a cue for future directions in this research, the idea of motherhood as a desire can be explored further in the sense that systemic and organisational inequalities may make it hard for women to desire motherhood. However, regardless of the material conditions, some women may genuinely oppose the pressure of motherhood. We have not met such positionality amongst our interviewees, which does not preclude the importance of such views.

Gender inequalities are underpinned by many different structural and cultural factors, and appropriate responses begin with the drawing of a comprehensive set of legal and policy measures which can anchor news organisations' policies in this respect. As a part of the necessary structural changes, these measures include those to promote gender equality effectively, including investment in care services, tackling inequalities in career opportunities, developing more aggressive policies in the struggle against gender stereotypes and discrimination, or fighting gender-based violence. However, news organisations also need to go further in critical aspects. Firstly, they should question what constitutes an efficient newsroom in terms of the demanding nature of work at all costs. Organisations should prioritise journalists' well-being over unreasonable workloads, discourage the ideology of the good worker/journalist and the tendency for newsrooms' downsizing, and highlight the need to invest in a more diverse environment to which mothers and carers can contribute to the news in richer ways. Secondly, workloads must be designed on the assumption that all workers (and not just women) engage in domestic labour (Arabadjieva 2022), for example, by restructuring its working day in ways that allow more flexible workloads for both women and men. Thirdly, newsrooms should develop a culture shift towards more empathetic management styles that are more open to personal needs and determine the value of their staff based on their outputs rather than on their expected gender roles or their hours on the clock.

A cultural shift towards equal distribution of care work between men and women is slow, but it can be shaped by law and work regulations. However, legal frameworks must be reinforced by work cultures that are better when guided by an ethics of care (Steiner 2021), supporting women caring for children or family members, protecting their rights, and promoting all journalists' well-being. News organisations have much to gain in creating better workplaces for everyone, not only women. By implementing feminist ethics of care, editors will be paying closer attention to the concerns and needs of their journalists individually and as a community, which could foster a stronger sense of collaboration among them and ensure the much-needed diversity in the newsroom.

Workplace inequalities similarly affect women across various professions. Still, these are particularly consequential in the field of journalism as constraints to women journalists' careers and work policies extend beyond the personal level: they affect the women who are responsible for producing the information we consume and whose work can influence the larger citizenry, including other women as readers and news consumers. Therefore, conditioning women journalists as producers of information can shape broader societal and democratic processes by excluding voices, diversity, and perspectives. A central point in this research is that providing women journalists with more equity measures and better career conditions provides for better journalism and safeguards a healthy democracy.

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