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MANY STUDIES show that US newspapers tend to present Hispanics/Latinos (US residents of Latin American descent) as both a subordinated 'race' and as an underclass. But a close look at news coverage of Latinos in a typical US mid-size newspaper reveals something else. Latino news is also genderised in ways that underline Latinos' assumed race and class inferiority.

Genderisation can be understood here to refer to the way journalism ascribes gender-related attributes to social groups. This process occurs, for example, by writing either a 'soft' feature or a 'hard' news story on a given event or issue, or by placing a news item in the Home or Business section. It is also evident in the way that either men's or women's voices are privileged, and in foregrounding either men or women in photographs. Genderisation is also present in

have found. A minuscule fraction (0.14%) of the paper's archives of 181 088 items cover Latino current affairs. As researcher Gaye Tuchman would say, Latinos are "symbolically annihilated" – meaning that the mass media either ignore or systematically misrepresent marginalised groups in stereotypical, trivialising and disempowering ways.

In the few instances where Latinos are not invisible in the paper which I studied, they are portrayed as low-status individuals. There is a pattern of de-legitimising Latino knowledge. To take just one example, in a the front-page article, "More Latinos leaving Catholicism for Baptist faith", only one of the four pastors quoted as experts is Latino, and his knowledge is framed as secondary or supplementary in a 'sidebar'.

Researchers Lana Rakow and Kimberlie Kranich show that women often appear in news stories as ordinary people, as "specimens" ... "to illustrate the private consequences of public events and actions". "Here is what a woman who abuses her children looks like", "here is an ordinary woman who fled her home in an earthquake". Likewise, Latinos in the paper I studied often serve as a narrative device to make a connection between the private and the public spheres – rather than as authoritative sources of information.

Latino news in the paper is often covered by women reporters. Research on readers' perceptions of the work of male versus

'womanised'

The relative abundance of articles about Latinos with female bylines is likely to suggest to the average reader that Latino news is not as important

imbalances in coverage of actions pertaining to women's stereotypical domains (eg, food, education), versus stories about men's traditional domains (eg, politics, business).

In patriarchal cultures, imbuing a social group with feminine features has tremendous political consequences, because the group is automatically marked as inferior.

A detailed study of coverage in a prominent North Carolina daily newspaper shows that Latinos are portrayed as a particular race and a specific class – and as a people who exhibit traits that in Western culture are commonly attributed to women, such as being yielding, childlike and soft-spoken. Women in this model are assumed to be inferior, subordinate, dependent – and overlooked.

My analysis confirms the substantial invisibility of Latinos in news that other studies

This treatment echoes the status ascribed to 'womanhood'. The genderisation becomes even more apparent by the fact that the only Latino expert quoted on the paper's front page in the four years of my study was a woman. In other words, Latinos are represented by someone who is not recognised by patriarchal culture as a possessor of legiti-

mate knowledge – namely, a man.

Genderisation goes deeper still: most of the time, when Latinos are quoted, they are quoted as ordinary people talking about their personal experience, not as experts. This orientation towards personal experience is typically viewed as a form of subjective/feminine knowledge.

tributes to further genderisation of Latino news because:

- Latino current affairs are often covered as 'soft' rather than as 'hard' news, because, as noted by academic Liesbet van Zoonen, women journalists "tend to prevail in those areas that can be seen as an extension of their domestic responsibilities

In patriarchal cultures, imbuing a social group with feminine features has tremendous

Genderising Latino News

How media coverage conflates

Hispanics/Latinos are the fastest growing 'minority' in America, and may one day be the largest. No wonder, then, that much of the media tends to assign 'feminine' –

Lucila Vargas reports.



they are portrayed as low-status individuals. There is a pattern of de-legitimising Latino knowledge.

(such as) human interest and feature sections of newspapers”.

- The paper’s overall narrative about Latinos contains a relatively high number of female voices because – as many studies have shown – women journalists tend to include more women sources than their male counterparts.
- The coverage constructs the local Latino community as predominantly female. Portrayals of individual members of a group add flesh and texture to that group’s public identity. I found only six lengthy features about Latino individuals, and they profile six women, but only three men. Apart from a Cuban-American man, women are the sole focus of entire articles, and the longest profile features a woman. This predominance of Latinas as newsmakers contradicts the news media’s tendency to neglect women newsmakers, but adds to the picture of Latinos in general as subordinate.

as other news.

The body politic is the male domain *par excellence*. Although Latinos have become an important political constituency, Latino politicians (overwhelmingly men) and Latino advocacy organisations (male-dominated institutions) are diminished by neglecting to record their speech.

Two sample front-page items in the paper I studied deal with a crucial political issue for

of a single member of the Hispanic Caucus.

The near absence of references to Latino political organisations, coupled with this scarcity of quotes from Latino politicians and the downplaying of their accomplishments, restricts Latino public/political participation. As feminist writer Jean Bethke Elshtain contends, the failure to record the public speech of women and other social groups has been instrumental in trivialising their public presence and restricting their political actions.

The patriarchal male/female divide means that social life is structured according to neatly divided spheres: work/leisure, political/domestic, public/private, economic life/emotional life, and so forth. Those who perform in the public sphere of work and economic life are gendered as masculine; those who do not, as feminine.

Two traditionally male-dominated sections, Sports and Business, are conspicuous for their extremely poor coverage of Latino news. I found only five items on Latino news in the Business section. In addition, there was a story framed as an affirmative action piece rather than as a business article. Its focus is racial-ethnic strife, not business. Moreover, the few items about Latino businesses are

‘yielding’

Latinos are farmworkers; 2) farmworkers are victims; 3) farmworkers are passive; and 4) farmworkers are ‘illegal aliens’. In most stories, farmworkers are deprived of their vigour by being deprived of agency. They are described as experiencing situations rather than as performing actions. Thus, the construction of farmworkers as victims and as passive draws on the association of women and victimisation that is prevalent in Western culture and often reproduced by the news media.

Nonetheless, I also found some paradoxes. For instance, a source of ambivalence in the coverage has to do with coverage of Cuban Americans who are highlighted as having masculine traits. The Cuban-American population, at least in the immigration wave of the early 1960s, is composed of white, middle and upper class individuals. It seems therefore that the genderisation of Latinos is conflated with race and class distinctions.

My study examined the coverage of one newspaper only, in a particular setting and

time. However, since 46% of the 259 items, and over 25% of the 16 front-page items that I examined, were provided by prestigious wire services, the analysis suggests that the genderisation of Latino news may not be unique to that paper only.

So why does the coverage of Latino current affairs turn out to be the way it is, despite – as appears to be the case with the paper I studied – the best of editorial intentions? Most critical probably are journalists’ personal values and, especially, their attitudes, beliefs and ideological assumptions about Latinos and, more generally, about ‘others’.

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Latinos, the support of minority congressional caucuses. Although these are fairly long articles, they mention Latino newsmakers only in passing. One article, “*GOP targets congressional caucus money*”, focuses on the Congressional Black Caucus and contains only an incidental reference to the Hispanic Caucus. The article fails to include the voice

often ‘womanised’ by placement and style. Two stories about local stores catering to Latinos are crafted as human interest stories rather than as business articles.

Genderisation processes work hand in hand with processes of economic stratification to produce the paper’s overriding class narrative. This narrative assumes that 1)

gender, race and class

day surpass the white population in some states. read ‘subordinate’ – attributes to them in their coverage.

‘feminine’



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