

# Identity in Journalism

## 1. Summary of the Research Plan

How does the identity of journalists shape news content, and to what extent does this impact readers' beliefs? Over the past decade, The New York Times has increased both the share of reporters of color and the share of female reporters by 10 percentage points, and in many newsrooms, diversity has become central ([New York Times diversity call to action](#)) A large body of work highlighted the importance of diversity in various spheres, including education, business, and governance (Alesina and La Ferrara 2005; Hoogendoorn et al. 2013; Kogan et al. 2021); as well as its positive effects in the workplace. Yet, little is known about the role of journalists' identities in shaping media content. If identity does matter in shaping content, this might, in turn, drive persuasion and shape readers' beliefs, as many papers highlight the role of slanted media in affecting readers (Djourelouva 2023, Martin and Yurukoglu 2017), and would highlight a channel of identity-based persuasion.

My agenda over the next two years aims to fill these gaps and provide evidence on the role of reporters' identity in affecting media content and persuasion in different contexts. In Paper 1 (P1), I focus on gender as an identity dimension and on its effect on news content in the context of violence against women (VAW) in Italy. I create a novel dataset of newspaper articles about voluntary homicides (murders) in which the victim is a woman, and the perpetrator is a man, happening in Italy from 2006 to 2022, and link these articles with information about the murders and reporters' demographics. I exploit the quasi-random assignment of journalists to crimes and find that having a female author substantially affects how these events are covered. Female authors are more likely to comply with international journalistic guidelines on reporting about VAW. For instance, they are twice as likely as male reporters to mention the Italian helpline number for VAW and around 10 percentage points less likely to mention a fit of rage. These differences hold within newspapers and crimes and are not driven by differences in age or reporters' gender norms. To see how these gender differences affect beliefs of readers, I plan to run an online experiment where I can isolate the effects of the different practices along which female and male reporters differ. In particular, I plan to randomize the presence of practices and look at their effects on attitudes toward the crime (e.g., the harshness of punishment), engagement with the article (e.g., willingness to read additional articles), and policy preferences (preferences for policies supporting women vs. for policies for educating society).

The second paper builds on the results above and aims to study the effect of raising awareness for journalists on the effects on readers of the different practices of male and female reports. For this purpose, I am collaborating with an online Italian newspaper to conduct a field experiment with journalists. In this experiment, I plan to show the results from P1 to a random sub-sample of journalists and have them write a 200-word snippet. Additionally, to investigate the effect on their preferences for diversity in the newsroom, I plan to ask them about their willingness to collaborate with a reporter of a different gender in an article about such topics.

Finally, in the third paper, I plan to replicate the analysis from the first project on a sample of newspapers from the U.S. Additionally, I plan to investigate the effect of racial identity on reporting in the United States. In particular, I plan to investigate the impact of having a Black reporter authoring an article about crimes involving a Black offender. I plan to combine the data on newspaper articles by Dell et al. (2023) and [NewsLibrary](#). For

the second part of the project, I will create two sets of outcomes. First, I plan to leverage word embeddings following the approach by Ash et al. (2024) to investigate the social distance between White Americans and African Americans. Additionally, I plan to investigate the most associated words with African Americans.

## References

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