Soft Women and Hard News: Female Journalists in Hyderabad

Louise Krüger

Master’s Thesis
Department of Social Anthropology
University of Oslo

May 2019
# Table of Contents

Abstract 3

Acknowledgements 4

Introduction 5

**Chapter One:** The Heavy Machinery 14

**Chapter Two:** Ground Rules and Safe Space(s) 20

**Chapter Three:** Soft Women, Soft Voices 40

**Chapter Four:** How Women Work in a Man’s World 65

Concluding Remarks 102

Bibliography 103
Abstract

This master’s thesis explores the newsroom culture at Telangana Today in Hyderabad, India and examines how female reporters negotiate the gendered politics within the newsroom and more generally in their daily lives.

The newsroom in Telangana Today – as elsewhere in India – is still predominantly a male domain of work, and the dynamics that are at play are largely shaped by patriarchal norms, values and traditions. The ‘hardcore’ male reporters cover ‘hard’ news, whereas female reporters are directed towards news dealing with ‘women’s issues’, fashion, clothing and so on. Women’s perceived ‘softness’ does not only affect the stories they cover, but also how they are expected to act; to speak in lower voices or not go out on late-night reporting, keeping them away from the ‘harder’ news.

Despite these conditions, the women studied have defied these social pressures by using their voices differently – echoing their words through written pieces, not spoken. Due to the support of their editor, Shanti, and the sense of safety that the other journalists construct collaboratively, they write articles that do not always adhere to the ‘soft’ categories, using different strategies to overcome the instructions they were meant to adhere to. Having an all-women’s team has thus allowed the women to come together and challenge the existing structures.

In exploring the lives of the female reporters at Telangana Today, I have, within the scope of the study, developed an understanding of how the discriminatory beliefs within the newsroom have affected the female reporters. I have also seen how they challenge such beliefs, writing stories not always seen fitting the ‘soft’ news categories, allowing them to construct collective identities and create opportunities for themselves. I conclude that the safe space within the newspaper has helped create an aura of safety around the female reporters whilst providing powerful strategies for women to develop effective ‘voices’ in contexts where they are expected to subordinate their voices to men’s.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Angang, Aien, Nikita, Rucili, Keerthana, Harini and Vishnu, for the endless talks we had out on the porch, the karaoke sessions in the living room and all the good times. I especially wish to thank Angang and Aien for letting me stay with them and for making me a part of the ‘sisterhood’ – I am forever grateful and already excited to come back. I also wish to thank Shanti, Shrinivas, Manvi, Bhawna, Lekha, Sharjeel, Balu and the rest of the reporters in Telangana Today who has shared their thoughts and helped me understand the rich and complex relations between women, men and the media. This master’s thesis would not have been possible without all of you.

I would also like to thank Johanna and Tanmay for welcoming me in India and helping me to find my way in Hyderabad. In addition, I would like to thank my great supervisors Matthew Tomlinson and Ingrid M. Tolstad; this master’s is the better for their insights.

This is dedicated to the ‘sisterhood’, the female journalists I lived with in Hyderabad.
“It’s several layers that explain why it’s difficult for women in media. They have to swim across an ocean of barriers and find their way”.

- Nikita

Introduction

The inspiration for this master’s thesis came to me quite unexpectedly. The same semester I started my masters in Social Anthropology, I also started a new bachelors degree in Journalism. My initial plan was to live with female Sherpas in the Himalayan Mountains, but after three weeks in Nepal I realised I was unable to follow through. Not only did I find it difficult to locate informants, but I also had a lurking sense of reluctance towards my project. In a cold hotel room in Pokhara I took a drastic decision: I had to change my project, not only for the sake of lacking informants, but also due to my own motivation. After having hit rock bottom, I got accepted for OMEN’s (Organizing for Media Innovation) master scholarship at the Work Research Institute at Oslo Metropolitan University, and now I could finally write a media-related project, and also be a part of a bigger research project. The project is seeking to find new ways of innovation for media houses in an increasingly digitized world. As there are few English media houses in Nepal, I realised I needed to relocate my project. Having been in India the year before and also focusing my M.A Honours dissertation on female surfers in India, I was now sure: I had to go to India.

In India I began my hunt for new informants and quite fortuitously – through an expat Facebook group – I got in touch with Angang, who worked at Telangana Today. The same night I contacted her, I met Angang and her two colleagues in a restaurant in downtown Hyderabad. Thinking back almost makes me laugh, as we were trying to have conversation in what must be Hyderabad’s noisiest restaurant. Luckily, I was invited back to their apartment and met their three roommates – two of them also
working as journalists. On my way home that night, after hours of chit chat, I knew I had found my main informants. Two days after, I received an email from Angang who told me Telangana Today was happy to accept their first foreign intern and on the spur of the moment, I was invited to join the world of Hyderabad’s printed media landscape.

In this masters thesis, I want to look at female reporters at the Tabloid section in Telangana Today, and investigate their experiences of being female journalists. My main focal point is the women in the Tabloid section – which is the only editorial team within the newspaper consisting entirely of women. An all-women’s team is a rare sight in Indian news organisations, as media in general is very male-oriented. What are the experiences of these women? How has their journey within a world sometimes considered a ‘man’s world’ been? By exploring diverse forms of women’s agency, I will investigate how women construct collective identities and create opportunities for themselves.

The newsroom in India – as elsewhere in the world – is still predominantly a male domain of work, and the dynamics that are at play are largely shaped by patriarchal norms, values and traditions. This thesis will try to show how women are being denied an equal place at the reporters’ table, and that the “hierarchical division between the ‘hard’ news (serious and important) to be covered by male journalists and (...) the ‘soft’ news (trivial and insignificant) reported by female journalists” (Carter, Branston & Allan, 1998, p. 13) is still very much alive. In Telangana Today, women also tended to be directed towards the ‘softer’ news. During my research there were a total staff of 90 journalists, in which 19 were women. Nine women worked in Tabloid, three in the web-desk, four in the main desk (editing and proofreading), and three in the Sunday edition. In other words, no women worked in the Bureau. The majority worked either with Tabloid news or with editing work at the desk.

As such, I will highlight the discriminatory beliefs about women’s professional capabilities (Carter et al, 1998). During my research at Telangana Today, I often heard sentiments such as ‘women are more creative’ and ‘men are better at handling the serious stuff’. In this thesis, I analyse the construction of these beliefs as well as women’s challenges to them.
Due to the hierarchical division, the ‘hardcore’ men were also placed higher on the ladder of journalistic importance. As they were dealing with the news that was seen as most important (in the eyes of the owners of the newspaper), they were granted more power to do what they thought best. As such, they set the standards for the rest of the newsroom, whereas the rest had to follow. Interestingly, other editorial teams, such as the web-desk, were not granted the same level of power as they were seen as having a lower position than the men in the Bureau. The power relations were in other words not always based on a purely male / female dynamic, but rather, on the background of the different journalists and – even more importantly – what they wrote about.

In spite of the fact that most scholars seem to have an intuitive understanding of what soft and hard news is, there is no consensus about the specific definitions of the two news divisions. In this thesis, I will stick to Reinermann et al.’s (2012) definition, of hard news as “reports about politics, public administration, the economy, science, technology”, and soft news as “reports about celebrities, human interest, sport and other entertainment-centered stories” (p. 224). I have chosen these definitions as they fit the categories that the reporters used most often at Telangana Today. “Hard” news does not necessarily have greater social value than “soft” news; some “hard” topics are of limited interest and some “soft” topics are considered to be of great relevance. News about Indian celebrities, for example, may indeed advocate certain social issues, something that is at the very core of the discussion in my 4th chapter. This thesis offers a conceptual analysis of the two categories, and what meanings that are attached to them within Telangana Today.

At Telangana Today the male reporters, the ‘hardcore’, were at the top of the ladder. They were the hardheaded individuals in the office, who spoke louder, laughed louder and generally took up more ‘space’. Seen as serious and resourceful reporters, they were sent out to cover ‘hard’ news – the essence of what Telangana Today focused on.

The female reporters, on the other hand, were often seen as ‘soft’. As they were writing about softer news, their written articles had to focus on the softer subjects relating to women’s issues, fashion, clothing, travel and so on. Seen as more caring
and compassionate, women were directed towards news that was considered trivial by the editors. Interestingly, a lot of the women in Tabloid preferred writing about political developments and feminism, and even though these news stories were not always seen as fitting the ‘softer’ feature-stories in Tabloid, they however managed to get these stories through. The editors wanted the women to draw the attention of younger readers, but they were also concerned when publishing anything that seemed too blunt. The things women had to write about had to be seen as ‘easy’ and ‘fun’ to read. As such, not only were the male editors undermining the female readership, but also the entire ‘soft’ news category when saying these themes could not be political or take serious personal issues into account, too.

On the other hand, having an all-women’s team allowed the women to come together and exchange ideas, and due to the close-knit space, and not to mention safety between the female journalists, they used different strategies to overcome the instructions they were meant to adhere to. One of these strategies, I argue, happens through the support of their editor, Shanti. Because she always fought to make their articles and ideas come through, the women knew they had her support, making them take on tasks they might not have under the guidance of a different leader. It was, however, either Lalith or Shrinivas who had the last say in terms of what articles were published or not. The women knew that if they handed in articles right before the deadline, the editors had no other choice but to accept their articles, even if they were sometimes seen as ‘too serious’, and as such, they were challenging discriminatory beliefs. These strategies, I believe, are tools of empowerment.

Safety and transport is another thing that keeps a lot of women away from the ‘harder’ news. Because it is generally seen as less safe for women to roam around the streets at night – when much of the ‘hardcore’ reporting takes place – they are often directed to the softer subjects. Telangana Today offered private transport to all the women who chose to overlook the dangers of late-night work, giving them transport home from the office. As such, Telangana Today catered for women’s needs, but only to a certain extent, as the taxi service proved to be both time-consuming and also, ironically enough, unsafe.
Using one’s voice is also at the very core of this thesis. Women in India are taught from a young age to speak and act in a ‘soft’ way. In one way, this enhances femininity, but it also keeps women from seeming ‘too outgoing’ and too daring, as many families are scared that their daughters are. The women in Telangana Today often spoke more softly than their male colleagues, and sometimes, even though sitting right next to each other, one could struggle to hear what was said. However, even though the women did not always speak very loudly, they used their voices differently – echoing their thoughts through written pieces, not spoken. They used their inner voices as an important tool of overcoming gender-related barriers, and also, this proved to be a way of enhancing their empowerment and agency. What I want to explore is the strategies women use to develop effective ‘voices’ in contexts where they are expected to subordinate their voices to men’s.

In the first chapter, I will introduce the different editorial teams in Telangana Today and ‘set the scene’, while giving a brief introduction to Hyderabad’s media landscape.

In chapter 2, I will explore the different editions and editorial responsibilities within Telangana Today and the hierarchy that lies therein. I also analyze the meaning of “safe spaces”, and why they are important for women in Tabloid. I shall demonstrate why I believe such instances are needed in newsrooms, and how “safe spaces” allow journalists who may be perceived as inferior to challenge the existing hierarchical structures.

In the third chapter, I will turn to the meaning of voice, and especially ‘soft’ voices. In India women are often taught to speak in ‘soft’ voices in order to be perceived as feminine, while society allows men to display a more boisterous, loud behavior. While women may speak in ‘soft’ voices in Telangana Today, I however argue that, despite their lower sonic voices, women use their voices differently, and that they are more likely to express opinions in their journalistic articles. Written work by women is not only a way of expressing a woman’s own thoughts, but is, as I demonstrate, important tools that may lead to empowerment and enhanced agency. It is important to note that when exploring agency and voice, are the ambiguities in such a project. I however believe that when focusing on how women perceive themselves, generalizations that all research on gender may pose is avoided.
In chapter four, I look at why women are seen as best suited to work in ‘softer’ news. Why is ‘hard’ news at the top of the hierarchical ladder when soft news advocates certain social issues too? This chapter thus looks at this question in more depth; why news seen as ‘soft’ is often devalued and undermined, and the reasons why women tend to cover it. I will also offer a conceptual analysis of the two categories, and what meanings that are attached to them within Telangana Today. I will portray how women in Tabloid have found a ‘golden middle way’ when being a part of a ‘safe space’, where they can indeed both act as ‘soft’ while writing ‘hard’ news. I will show how women are not kept away from ‘harder’ news, but they have to write about it in a style more suited for tabloids.
Methodology

During my time in Hyderabad and at Telangana Today, my main source of information was, in the words of the famous anthropologist Clifford Geertz, through “being there”. Not only did I work, but I also lived with my informants, engaging in their daily life and taking part in day-to-day activities. I am drawn to the remarks of Geertz and his argument in *Works and Lives* (1988) that “the ability of anthropologists to get us to take what they say seriously (…) has (to do) with their capacity to convince us that what they say is a result of having (…) one way or another, truly ‘been there’” (Geertz, 1988, p. 4). By fully encapsulating myself in the daily lives of my informants, I have gone from an intern to a colleague, a stranger to friend and an outsider to an insider.

Being there is not always just about ‘being there’, however – engaging yourself in the daily life of the people you are trying to understand may also include engagement with their thoughts and feelings, and especially because my informants are also my friends, I have felt how observations can change relatively quickly; one moment they are accepted wisdom, yet within a brief period of time they appear antiquated. Writing about good friends can also be problematic in the way that when you really start liking your informants, it might be hard to describe their ‘negative’ actions, and the things they do that does not sustain the glossy picture you may have of them.

My ethnography is, as you will notice, based on ethnographic interviews. Some may argue that what people say is not always what they do, or, what we hear is what we want to hear. Much of my fieldwork is, in the words of the eminent scholar Arjun Appadurai (1988) “organized talk” — and conversations lie at the heart of my fieldwork (p. 16). Seeking to find the ‘true voices’ of one’s informants might however pose a threat of ventriloquism:

“while one part of our traditions dictates that we will be the transparent medium for the voices of those we encounter in the field, that we speak the native point of view, it is equally true that what we find in what we hear some
In order to capture the ‘real’ voices of my informants, I have thus not only interviewed them but lived with them, engaging myself in their daily life and thus, hopefully, helped to “empower the interviewee to control the direction, content and scope of the conversation (Munz, 2018, p 4). It however also became clear to me during the scope of my research that searching for someone’s ‘real’ voice is somewhat naïve – women’s voices and what volume they speak is not a definite, consistent ‘thing’. Finding someone’s real voice is not about seeing how they are at a specific time of day, but taking the whole self into account, something I will further describe in chapter three.

It is also clear that the different interactions I have narrated are complex and full of nuances. In order to avoid unwarranted generalizations, I however focus on how women perceive themselves, not on how they may seem outwards. If they perceive themselves as empowered and able to say what they want, I argue that they thus are. It is clear that all the women in Tabloid use their voices differently, and I feel it imperative from a personal and ethical perspective to capture the “diversity of voices” I have heard in the field (Appadurai, 1988, p. 17).

As an outsider you are in an uncertain position when trying to explore gendered politics in a society where you have not grown up yourself, and a general tendency of outsiders critiquing Indian women’s subordination may lead to the pitfalls of harmful generalisation (Jeffery & Jeffery, 1996). In order to avoid unwarranted generalisations, I focus on women’s voices at Telangana Today – their own reflections on the limits and possibilities they face in their jobs. This approach will reveal the women’s analytical acumen and offer ‘outsider’ analysts such as myself as a sharp perspective on the dense tangle of Indian gender politics.

Lastly, the narrative accounts in this master’s thesis are not built purely upon an outsider’s view. As noted earlier, I am a journalism student myself and so this thesis is also auto-ethnographic. Leavy describes “auto-ethnography” as occurring when anthropologists conduct and write ethnographies of their ‘own people’” (Leavy, 2014,
Certainly, being a young reporter, this is in part exactly what I did, choosing a field location tied to my identity as a journalist, and subsequently basing my field observations on ‘hanging out’ with other female journalists.

The names that I am presenting in this thesis are the real names of my informants – which they have given me the permission to include.
Chapter One: The Heavy Machinery

“Oh, you work in Telangana Today? Then you are the voice of KCR!”
- Giggling woman at a friend’s party

The first printed version of Telangana Today landed on people’s doormats in December 2016. Since then, the newspaper has undergone several changes – both in terms of the actual content and display of the newspaper, as well as the journalists working there. Today there are 90 employees in Telangana Today, and of these, 19 are female.

In this chapter, I will provide a brief explanation of Hyderabad’s media landscape, and explain where Telangana Today lies on the map. I will also introduce the different editions of the newspaper, and noteworthy reporters within each team.

Setting the Agenda

The major English dailies in Hyderabad are The Deccan Chronicle, Times of India, Business Standard, The Economic Times, Metro India and Telangana Today. As Hyderabad is India’s fourth-most populous city, and the city is one of the most productive metro areas in India, a lot of major companies are based here, which has – naturally – boosted the city’s sectors of trade, transport and communication. The media landscape in Hyderabad is thus wide and has several newspapers in Telugu, Urdu, Hindi and English.

Telangana Today focuses on politics and developments within the Telangana state. Their office is based in Banjara Hills in Hyderabad, in the same building as the sister publication Namasthe Telangana. While Telangana Today is an English-language newspaper, Namasthe Telangna is in Telugu, the local language of the state of Telangana.
When understanding the media scene in Hyderabad (and India), and what kind of newspaper Telangana Today is, the matter of ownership is crucial. Telangana Today is owned by Telangana Publications, which is owned in turn by the Chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao (known as KCR). KCR is the founder of the political party Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) – the political party which won state elections in 2014, and then again in September 2018.

The matter of ownership and what sort of power KCR possess over Telangana Today is as interesting as it is ambiguous. When I interviewed the editor K. Shrinivas Reddy in late April 2018, and asked him how the newspaper was affected by the fact that “KCR in fact owned the newspaper” (as I put it bluntly), my question was not well received. I had already been interning in the newspaper well over two months and had picked up on the much spoken-about ownership. While some journalists in Telangana Today spoke openly about the connection they had to TRS, others (like Shrinivas) deeply rejected it.

What I did not know at that point was the pressing situation Shrinivas may have found himself in. Before coming to Telangana Today, Shrinivas had been working in The Hindu, one of India’s most renowned newspapers, for over twenty-five years. People sometimes referred to him as the ‘silver leopard’, and he was known to be a particularly skilled political journalist. When Telangana Today was launched, it got a lot of attention. In one article in The Hindustan Times, it was said that Telangana’s newest English daily was “likely to serve as KCR’s mouthpiece” (Apparasu, 2018). The Indian Journalist’s Union stated that “apparently, KCR is not satisfied with the way the existing English dailies are covering his party and government. He feels they are not giving enough positive coverage, so he wants his own mouthpiece” (Apparasu, 2018).

Shrinivas, on the other hand, who is also quoted in the article, points out that Telangana Today will “speak out for the people. It is not that our paper is going to be

---

1 I later learned to be much more careful when asking people about the ownership, and instead of asking people straightforwardly, I started initiating conversations based on the premise that the journalists themselves could speak about the ownership if they wanted to. Having more open questions about the ownership rather than stating the ownership myself, proved to work better.
the mouth piece of the government, we shall take the side of the people” (Apparasu, 2018). Stepping down from his high position at The Hindu and then joining a newspaper with perhaps more questionable methods on news coverage might have been somewhat of a rocky path, as he was now questioned about his relationship with KCR, and also, his integrity as a journalist.

Other journalists spoke more openly about the relationship between TRS and Telangana Today. When I asked Balu, one of the reporters in the Bureau, about the main readers of the newspaper, he said:

“It is political parties, people that are interested in state politics, they want to know what the ruling party is thinking about, what it is saying. So they want the newspaper to provide them with that inside information. Or, hints of what might be happening...

- Balu

He believed that the ownership affected at least ‘half of what they did’. During my time in Telangana Today, it was especially interesting to be there as it was just months before the new election and the newspaper seemed to be particularly careful to have a certain number of articles focusing on progress that TRS had contributed to in order to maintain their position in the government.

The political rhetoric was most visible in the Bureau, the editorial team that dealt with ‘hard’ news. Yet, during the months of my internship, it became clear that all the different editorial teams in Telangana Today were indeed affected by the ownership. Even if in different ways, the political part of Telangana Today is crucial to describe when laying out the social map and the different editions within the newsroom, and is something I will keep returning to in the following chapters.

In the preceding paragraph I will shortly describe each editorial team in the newsroom, and the journalists that work there. This is a short description that does not in any way capture the vibrant social milieu that lies therein – this is rather a quick introduction to pinpoint the different editorial groups. In chapter 2, however, I will turn to a more descriptive and hopefully more ‘alive’ description of the newsroom.
The Teams

Tabloid

The majority of women in Telangana Today work in Tabloid. The Tabloid team consists of seven full-time reporters. They work every day from noon to 7pm. Four of the reporters, Angang, Keerthana, Jaya and Bawna, in addition to the team’s editor, Shanti, joined Telangana Today a year before the paper actually launched. Later Lekha, Dheeraja, Somya and Sweta joined, and apart from the occasional intern, they were all in charge of the stories and articles published in Tabloid each day. The Tabloid team also had two male designers, but they did not start work before 2 pm so that they had time to form the pages before the deadline at 4:30 pm, and thus, Tabloid was described as an all-women’s team.

Tabloid is – as the name suggests – the part of newspaper focusing on feature news: fashion, travel, food, culture – topics usually associated with ‘soft’ news (though, as we shall see in chapter 4, the ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ news categories are not as distinct as one might think). I will continually return to many of those working in Tabloid – they are in many ways the principal actors within this thesis.

City Bureau

Whereas the Tab-team only has female reporters, the city Bureau has male ones, and consists of fifteen full-time reporters and Lalith, the editor. The reporters usually arrive work at 4pm, and work until their deadline at 9pm. The Bureau reports on crime, politics, current affairs and business. It was also referred to as the ‘main sheet’, implying that the Bureau worked on ‘main’ part of the newspaper. Dealing with ‘hard’ news, the Bureau documented crime and politics, mostly in Hyderabad and in Telangana state. A lot of the ‘hard’ news reporters who started working in Telangana Today came solely because they wanted to work for Shrinivas. The editor, Lalith, was one of these people, and understandably, the ‘hardcore’ reporters, Lalith and
Shrinivas were all a tight-knit team. Being the team who wrote about the political situation in Telangana Today, it was often said the reporters had an important job. They in many ways knew what they had signed up for before coming to Telangana Today, and if they messed up – going against the owner’s wishes – they knew they would not have a place to come back to. There was in other words a lot of pressure resting on the shoulders of these reporters, but on the other hand, more admiration from others came with it. Sharjeel and Balu, as I will often return to, worked in the Bureau.

**The main desk**

The desk was often referred to as the “pressure cooker”. Situated in the inner right corner, the desk had the biggest editorial team with both male and female journalists. Out of the fifteen journalists, there were four females. The two editors, Ratsin and Ragu, were in charge of the desk. Being in charge of editing and proofreading all the pages being sent by the main Bureau before the deadline at 11 pm, the pressure, as well as the voices, rose higher and higher the closer to the deadline. Two of the women I spent a lot of time with, Rucili and Vishnu, worked at the central desk. Rucili lived together with Angang and the rest of the women, while Vishnu lived together with her husband only minutes away from the office.

**Web-desk**

The web-desk was the first thing you stumbled upon when walking in to Telangana Today, and similarly to Tabloid, the desk only had young reporters. The desk team consisted of six fulltime employees. Their responsibility was to ensure that the most important articles from the printed newspaper ended up online. To fit the articles to the online format, they would sometimes edit the articles, either making them shorter or longer, adding or changing the headlines to make them more visible. The web-team usually worked the same hours as the desk, starting their shift at 4pm and leaving work at around 12 pm. There were four male reporters in the web-team; Santosh, Elaklavia, Ivan and Indrajeet – who was in charge – and two female, Veronica and Gaura. Nikita, who was a close friend of Angang, had previously worked at the desk,
but shifted when she was offered a job in commercial media. Veronica, Ivan and Nikita usually spent a lot of time together with Angang and the rest of the girls.

**Sunday Scape**

Sunday Scape was the other all-women’s team in Telangana Today and collaborated with Tabloid. The editor, Madhuri, and two female reporters worked for this section, a Sunday supplement that usually had longer stories and interviews. The Sunday Scape was a typical ‘weekend magazine’, and sometimes the reporters in Tabloid also wrote for Sunday Scape. The reporters in Sunday Scape worked the same hours as the women in Tabloid.

**Sports**

There were two sports journalists in Tabloid. One of them, Sujay, was a good friend of Angang and her neighbors. The sports team usually worked the same hours as the Bureau, as their articles also went into the main sheet.

**Designers**

Most of the designers in Telangana Today worked in the desk, designing the pages in the main sheet. Two of the designers worked in Tabloid, and one designer worked on putting Sunday Scape together.

Due to my role as an intern in Tabloid, I have chosen to focus most of my research on that particular team. As with all good academic research, you cannot simply drag the social actors out of their habitat without exploring their habitat closely – and most importantly, the people within and around it. In order to identify the hierarchical structures at Telangana Today, I will describe the different spaces within the newsroom and the power relations these spaces both shape and reflect.
Chapter Two: Ground Rules and Safe Space(s)

It is Saturday; usually a rather quiet day, and today is no different. Only Angang, Bhawna, Somya and I have found our way to the Tab’s corner, and the vibe feels friendly and serene – like we finally have time to talk and show each other the things we have been working on, and not only stare intensely at our screens. In the other editorial teams there are also few people today. Only a couple of journalists in the Bureau as well as us in Tabloid have found their way to the office. I have just finished writing today’s article on “Where to find your new fling” and scrolled down on Youtube while discussing Bollywood songs with Bhawna and Somya. Suddenly a live-stream of Meghan and Harry’s wedding pops up on Angang’s screen, and Bhawna almost falls off her chair in excitement: “It’s today! It’s finally today!” We gather around Angang to catch a glimpse of Meghan Markle when Somya suggests: why not watch the wedding on TV? She walks over to the main desk and grabs the TV-remote. Situated right over our heads in Tabloid, you would think it was meant for our use, but usually the reporters next to us, in the city Bureau, are the ones who use it regularly, either to watch politics or cricket. Today seems like perfect occasion for us to finally make use of it, too.

As we find the right channel where the wedding is broadcast, everyone in Tabloid seems happy with Somya’s idea. We cheer quietly as we spot Meghan arriving St. George’s Chapel. I notice how the other reporters in the Bureau start looking – more at us than at the TV – seemingly surprised by the fact we are actually using ‘their’ TV. Suddenly – zap – the picture goes from British high society to Indian cricket, and we turn to see how one of the reporters has quietly grabbed the remote and changed the channel. He looks at us, intensely, almost as if he changed the channel just to see how we react.

Somya turns over to him and explains that we are actually watching the wedding. She looks embarrassed, as if she’s unsure whether to say something or not. “Aha”, he says. “Are you writing about it?” Somya shakes her head sheepishly before answering “Well, no, but...” The reporter zaps again, surprisingly back to BBC while looking at us cunningly. I turn to Somya, trying to hide my annoyance: “He knew we were
watching?!” She looks at me and nods. “Of course. He’s just pretending not to. Of course he knew we were watching”. The vibe has changed, and it’s like you can touch the uneasiness in the air. Watching how yet another celebrity arrives at the wedding, eager to see what kind of hat Princess Beatrice has chosen for the occasion, the tension is soon forgotten. Suddenly – zap! The channel is changed again! We turn to see that this time, it’s Lalith, the editor of the main edition, who has the remote on his desk. I ask the other girls if I can go change the channel, but they shake their heads. Overstepping the editor’s choice is a no-go, even I recognize that. It’s clear that Lalith isn’t really watching, and after a while, he walks away from his desk and towards the main editor’s office, Shrinivas. Somya looks around, contemplating whether to go get the remote and not, and decides to ask the reporter who initially changed the channel if he can switch back to the wedding. He shakes his head, mumbling something in Hindi about ‘sir’, and I am guessing he’s mentioning Lalith and that ultimately it is his decision. She seems to agree, but after a couple of minutes she determinedly walks over to Lalith’s desk, grabs the TV-remote and walks back to Tabloid – smiling invincibly. Happy, but also slightly worried about what she just did, she whispers to me: “I took advantage of the situation. All the editors are in a meeting, so they can’t do anything about it.” We all laugh. “Actually”, she continues, “I am sure they just pretended it was Lalith who changed the channel. They are smart that way”.

Sometimes the small gestures in a situation can tell far more about the underlying relationships than what we initially think. What seemed like a meaningless fight over the TV-remote quickly turned into a power struggle – each social actor playing an important part of the social relations within the newsroom. In Telangana Today the different editions create ‘spaces within spaces’, and to understand them, we need to “‘pull them apart’ in order to first identify each simple map” (Ardener, 1993, p. 3). The space within the walls of Tabloid – also known as the women’s club – has its own set of rules, and those who enter will share certain defining features. When stepping outside Tabloid, however, there are other rules of conduct that apply. Similarly, the other teams have their own set of rules. In this opening chapter I want to explore the meaning of space, the different editorial teams, and how they often differ.
I argue that due to their safe space, the women working in Tabloid are part of a social sphere quite different to the other teams, where emotional support and togetherness allows for not only close, personal bonds, but also the sharing of opinions and ideas. Being in an environment where women are often perceived as having lower social positions due to the hierarchical categories within media, I argue that the women in Tabloid, despite their ‘lower’ ranking, exercise quite a lot of power in fact.

When comparing the different teams together, I have chosen to focus on the Bureau, the main desk and Tabloid, as these are the biggest editorial teams where I have seen the most significant ‘battles’. My focal point will be the youngest journalists in each team, and how they are treated, in order to contextualise and compare in the most effective way. I take this approach to try to arrive at a deeper understanding of the hierarchies and other ranking patterns that are within the walls of Telangana Today, and to show how Tabloid is ultimately different to the other editorial teams.

In this chapter I also explore the meaning of space, and particularly what it means to be a safe space. Are such spaces needed? What do they promote? I argue that safe spaces are important because they facilitate support and togetherness in a space where women – and youngsters – already are marginalised. Additionally, the safe space in Tabloid is not only crucial to the establishment of a community, but it also reinforces and strengthens the social power of the social agents therein, allowing the women to come together and challenge the existing power structures.

**Social Action**

Any newsroom in the world is a complicated platform of social organisation. All restricted areas, like a theatre, club or – as at Telangana Today – a workplace, have sets of rules demanding how the social actors within that space should act. A dozen people in a small room is not the same thing as a dozen people in a large room, and the seating space may create “the nature of social interaction” among those seated (Ardener, 1993, p. 2).
In Bourdieu’s influential ‘theory of practice’ as summarized by Moore (1986, p. 77), “space comes to have meaning through practice.” The meanings that are represented in the ordering of space are dependent upon the nature of the activities concerned – in other words, the actions that are performed in a certain social space are the things that give meaning to that particular space. Watching the wedding, for example, is an activity that created a sense of community in Tabloid, but not something the women in Tabloid necessarily thought about as doing just that. The practices are “not to be accounted for in terms of rule-following, but are to be seen as the working-out in social situations of sets of principles” (Moore, 1986, p. 77). Strictly speaking, an individual’s action does not only depend on the rules within a certain space, but also how the individual chooses to act. Sometimes we do things without even thinking about them; these powerful principles, which Bourdieu calls doxa, are bound within us. These actions help shape the system of social meanings and “operate as generative principles which inform action” (Moore 1986, p. 78).

Inside the walls of Telangana Today, reporters in the Bureau believed they dominated the space. Being ‘hardcore’ reporters, something I will return to in chapter 4, they reported on the ‘harder, political’ happenings within society, whereas the women in Tabloid dealt with ‘softer’ news – human-interest stories – which were given less importance. As a consequence, the women in Tabloid were often seen inferior to the reporters in city Bureau. The reporters did not always dominate the space as much as they liked to believe, however. Taking the TV-remote and choosing the channel was not a part of the social rules within the newsroom, but when carrying out these actions nevertheless, Somya showed how “actors are not unaware of the meanings and values associated with the organisation of space” (not wanting to interfere because the TV-remote was on Lalith’s desk), but “they are also in a position to choose how to invoke and reinterpret those meanings through their actions” (overlooking what the reporters said and taking control of the TV-remote anyhow; Moore 1986, p. 190). Somya, in other words, is a social actor who affects the system of meaning by both working within it and challenging it. I argue that Somya is able to do this because the safe space she has helped create for the women at Telangana Today enables this kind of public challenge.
Female Territory

The inner corner in Telangana Today is where the Tabloid team work. This is the “women’s club” – the only team in the newsroom consisting solely of female reporters. The two tables that extend from the middle of the newsroom and down to the far left corner are female territory, and even though the cardboard-thin barriers separating the departments are low, they feel like an invisible fence. Within Tabloid there is a sense of community and warmth that few of the other editorial teams can match. It’s almost like a sisterhood. During lengthy interviews, all the female reporters pointed out that what they liked best about working in an all-women’s team was the feeling of being heard and understood. Keertana (Kee) further illustrates this point when saying:

Since it’s an all women’s-team, there is an actual understanding. I am not saying if it were men in the team they would have been less understanding but... It comes naturally. Just as an example, when Bhawna’s son falls sick, and she cannot come on time, she would tell [Shanti] ‘Mam’. Mam would be compassionate, she would understand. She is also a mother. That kind of an understanding... And if I get my period or something, I don’t shy away from speaking about menstruation, or anything, but if I tell them I have severe cramps and I cannot come to the office on time, they [the team] do not have to put an extra effort into understanding that. There are certain things like that, in terms of understanding, which comes naturally. That’s one perk of an all women’s team.

- Kee (24)

As Kee and the other girls pointed out to me on several occasions, it was the vibe within the team they appreciated the most. Because they were all women, they knew the struggles each and everyone went through, and – more importantly – they could talk openly about them. Angang, who had worked in Tabloid since the beginning, agreed with Kee. She explained that some of her friends were having a hard time in

2 In India it is normal to address people that are higher in position ‘mam’ or ‘sir’ behind their name.
other media houses, struggling with the management and being heard. There was something different with Tabloid:

“First of all I like the fact that the whole Tabloid team is just women. It’s really nice. And the boss that we have... I have heard from my friends, who are having a really tough time in media houses, people are known to be very brutal and.. In the office here it’s very different. There is a good work-culture here, and my team.. I guess we are very cool about things”

- Angang (26)

In a sense they, as Shirley Ardener maintains, “may be thought of as (…) sharing a particular universe” (1993, p. 3), a universe in which personal sharing was encouraged and close relationships were built. Because most of the women in Tabloid were around the same age, they were also close personal friends. Working six days a week, Kee told me, made her colleagues almost seem like family. Because most of the women in Tabloid had begun working at the newspaper before it was actually launched, they had known each other for almost two years, something not always common in a field where many people shift between media houses on a monthly basis. At Telangana Today, everyone worked on contracts that lasted for three years. As a result, they had time to get to know each other, and developed close, personal bonds.

The women in Tabloid shared what many would define as a ‘safe space’ where the reporters could discuss their ideas and joke with their colleagues without fearing consequences. In addition, they could share personal issues – something very few of the other female reporters outside of Tabloid could. In the other teams, there were fewer female journalists, and as such, men decided the main categories of behavior. Vishnu, for example, who worked at the desk editing articles, were one of four women in her editorial team. Though she was happy overall with her work, she found it harder to come forward with personal issues and be honest about her personal life:

“The task is to make them [her male editors] understand that women’s issues are also tearing [people apart]. Every month it is the same scenario. I mean,
even if they are supportive, to make them understand we might need to take an hour or two off, is a task”.

- Vishnu (27)

As such, even though Vishnu was happy with her work situation, she found it hard to be honest. The women in Tabloid, on the other hand, did not have this issue. One of the main reasons as to why the girls felt safe and heard was because of the editor of the team, Shanti. The reporters in Tabloid saw Shanti as a compassionate leader, who did not have to put a lot of effort into understanding the issues they sometimes experienced. First of all, Shanti was a woman too, and if they had their periods or cramps, they could tell her directly without having to come up with excuses.

According to Wallin-Ruschman & Patka (2016), “a safe space intends to (…) allow physical and/or figurative room for identity development, social support, emotional connection, and a sense of community” (p. 319). Being able to talk about personal issues might seem like a trivial thing, but in order to create a safe space, opportunities for social support and emotional connection are vital. The women in Tabloid felt they could do just that – share – and thus grew an even tighter bond between them.

One of the positive outcomes of a tight, personal bond was effective decision-making. Instead of loud discussions, as were sometimes heard in the other editorial teams in Telangana Today, the decisions that were taken in Tabloid always happened through friendly conversations and light banter. The editor, Shanti, believed the best thing about having an all-women’s team was the “jokes we crack, the fun we have. That’s something you cannot do with guys present”. Shanti would always act in a relaxed, composed way – she would never scream at anyone, and if they made any mistakes, she would call them to her desk and tell them directly.

One of the first weeks during my internship, Lekha, Manvi and I walked up to the store to get juice after a long day of writing. Lekha and Manvi talked about their career in the media, and how afraid they had been entering the journalistic field after hearing scary rumors about hierarchy and strict leaders. Now, after working at Telangana Today for almost two years, they felt lucky to have a ‘boss’ that felt more like a friend than a remorseless honcho like the ones they had heard of. Lekha, who
had a friend working at the Times of India, explained how tough the working environment was there, and that when applying to Telangana Today, she had been worried she would experience the same. They were not the only ones who expressed this view. In several of the interviews with the reporters in Tabloid, they expressed appreciation for feeling safe and being able to say whatever came to their minds without fearing the consequences. Shanti was always there for them, and even if she did not always agree to what they said, she would always support them.

“We are very comfortable with each other. Shanti understands everything. Having a female boss and someone who is as understanding as Shanti, it is very nice... She gives us a lot of freedom. She wants all of us to have a byline, so she listens to us. No matter what.”

- Manvi (25)

In many ways Shanti was the ‘glue’ in Tabloid – she was the one who brought everyone together. Though it rarely happened, in the case of a disagreement, Shanti ‘mam’ immediately calmed things down. She acted, as she said herself, like the buffer for the pressure. She started her journalist career when she was 22 years old, and after working for some of the biggest newspapers in India, she decided to take a break from journalism. It was not until the main editor of Telangana Today, Shrinivas Reddy, contacted her that she considered going back to journalism. Having worked at The Hindu for five years with Shrinivas, the two knew each other well, and due to Shrinivas’ renowned position within the Hyderabad media, she agreed to come work for him. Shanti was in charge of all the articles in Tabloid and the team there. She cared deeply about her employees, or her ‘kids’ as she sometimes referred to them. Even though most of the women were in their mid 20’s, Shanti saw herself as their guardian:

I rely on my team a lot. I mean, I also see them as kids. That’s probably what stops me from losing my temper. I do it, I used to... I mean, of course sometimes I am angry, I just loose it, and I say “this cannot be done”, but my focus will be on talking to the girls as an entity rather than pinpointing the entire thing onto one individual.”
In the same manner, Shanti was deeply appreciated by her team. In my daily interactions at the office, I could see how Shanti was seen by Tabloid reporters as ‘one of their own’. Yes, she was in charge of them, managing their work, but the way she was included, and also included herself in daily banter and conversations, show how Shanti was seen differently to the other editors: she was an insider. Throughout the day, there would be laughter and inside-jokes between Shanti and the other reporters, but only in low voices to make sure the other editors wouldn’t hear. Not to say there was a bad vibe between the Tab team and the others around them, but they shared something special – something the surrounding journalists couldn’t take part in.

Naturally, as Shanti was in charge of the girls in the Tabloid, they knew her better, but the way she – together with her team – would sometimes mock the other editors and make fun of them, demonstrates how they were a part of an ‘inner circle’ the others were not. The two other editors – Shrinivas and Lalith, were always greeted in a friendly, but different way. They were the top editors and had higher positions than Shanti, and despite the friendly vibe between the girls and the two male editors, there was always a formal undertone. Similarly, Shanti knew both Shrinivas and Lalith well, but she did not chitchat with them as she did with the girls in Tab.

This is illustrated in a conversation we had during an office dinner with the Tabloid team after work. It was Jaya’s last day, and they reminisced back to the earlier days in Telangana Today. Jaya laughed and asked if they remembered “the one time Shanti made a fool of herself in the group chat”. They all laughed hysterically, and I asked them what happened. Apparently they had started a What’s App group with all the reporters in Tabloid and the two main editors, Lalith and Shrinivas, with the intention on making decisions easier and quicker. Posting in the group, Shanti had for a second forgotten the two male editors, and said something they were not supposed to know about. She then told us how she had “totally panicked”, trying to delete the message: “It was terrible”, she told me.
It took me a while to figure out what the message was actually about. First, I believed it was an inappropriate joke, but it turned out to be far more substantial than that.

When Jaya, one of the reporters in Tabloid, and Sharjeel, who first worked in Tabloid but then got shifted to the Bureau, started working together, they fell in love. Jaya was from a conservative Hindu-family, whereas Sharjeel was a Muslim. After months of keeping their relationship hidden, they decided to marry discreetly before they could present the topic in front of their parents. However, before they got the chance to tell them, Jaya’s parents found out and kicked her out of the house. She then moved in with Sharjeel’s family, who was worried about her and opened up to Shanti, one of very few people who knew about it. When Sharjeel asked Shanti what to do, Shanti replied in the WhatsApp group instead of directly to him. In the group was, as I earlier mentioned, also the two main editors in Telangana Today, who did not know about the situation, and so, she accidentally ‘spilled the beans’.

The other girls tried posting several messages in order to ‘hide’ the inappropriate message, but failed. “The editors definitely saw it”, they said. I asked if Shrinivas and Lalith ever mentioned it, but they shook their heads.

The whole office quickly learned to know about Sharjeel and Jaya’s situation, but luckily, nothing drastic happened. Not that they had any reason to interfere, but after talking to several of my informants – gossip is a big part of daily life in India – there is a sense that the public eye is “always watching”, and therefore, one should never speak of personal or difficult issues with others but close family. Seeing how Sharjeel chose to open up to Shanti not only says something about the difficult situation he might have been in, reaching out for help from someone outside his own family, but also how much he trusts Shanti and sees her as someone he can confide deeply private problems in – again portraying the high level of trust Shanti’s employees have for her.

The management did however choose to move Sharjeel from Tabloid to the Bureau. When talking to Sharjeel, he said he thought they needed more people in the Bureau, which was why he got shifted, whereas Shanti said Jaya and Sharjeel would never get the same day off (each employee in Tabloid chooses one day off per week), and that was the reason he went on working elsewhere. Others in Tabloid believed the management did not want a couple to work in the same edition. No matter what the real reason was, Sharjeel was shifted, and Tabloid was suddenly an all-women’s team.
“Right after we made a new group, just with us girls. Thank goodness!” In saying this, Shanti demonstrates that she feels like a part of the female troop, having more in common with her employees than with the two other editors. The way in which Sharjeel spoke to Shanti about his personal life also suggest that he trusts her, and chooses to talk to her over the other two male editors. Shanti is, in other words, good at cultivating safe spaces – not only when there are only female employees, but also male – she makes all her employees feel they are part of the inner circle. When saying she is happy there are only females left, it is more likely she refers to the two male editors than to Sharjeel, but on the other hand, she also pointed out repeatedly that she was happy there were only women in her team so that they could both talk and joke openly without having to hold anything back. Having a male in the team might have made it easier to cover late-night events (as I will return to in chapter 4), but it made it easier for the other women to open up and talk about things they might not have wanted to share with another male present.

**The Outside**

In other editorial teams, this particular connection of sameness and free expression was not always prominent. The desk for editing and proofreading, for example – often referred to as the “pressure cooker” – had the biggest editorial team with both male and female journalists. The desk was an interesting platform of social organisation, with many strong individuals seated around the same table. Out of the fifteen journalists, there were four females. Being in charge of editing and proofreading all the pages being sent by the main Bureau before the deadline at 11 PM, the pressure, as well as the voices, rose higher and higher closer to the deadline.

When I asked one of the subeditors about why some people at the desk seemed to enjoy the particularly stressful environment, he explained how the high energy level was something they hated but also loved. In a way, he said, “it made working at the desk ‘more fun’” – working late-night shifts six days a week is not for the faint-hearted, and the high tempo made chores seem more action-filled. The editors,
however, also became full of adrenaline. If they were happy with what you presented them, it was fine, but if not, they could be downright rude. It was especially the younger reporters who expressed feeling constantly challenged by the older reporters, female and male alike. The two senior editors were in many ways what others would define as arrogant, and this arrogance seemed to affect the other senior reporters in the team. As Bourdieu (1977) observes, “The ordering of space reproduce representations of such things as divisions by age, sex or position in the relations of production” (p. 72). By being more strict to the younger reporters, they contribute to the systems of classification and help secure the “reproduction of the power relations of which they are a product” (1977, p. 72). The Telangana Today offices present a clear map of the power relations and social dynamics expected among staff.

Rucili, or Ruci as everyone called her, had been working at the desk for almost two years, and was definitely the most extroverted woman at Telangana Today. She lived together with Keertana, who worked for Tabloid. Ruci’s descriptions of the ‘circus’ at the desk could sometimes entertain us for a whole evening, and she always told us the latest news at work. The desk was known to have a considerably faster pace than Tabloid and the city Bureau, and the two main editors Ratsin and Ragu were often shouting orders to their employees, and subsequently, contributing to the classification and reproduction of power-relations. Ruci sometimes explained how it felt like she was a “kid that was allowed to sit at the grown-up table”, being surrounded by older and more experienced journalists. She often felt undermined – like they didn’t really take her seriously – which she illustrated brilliantly during one of our many late-night conversations:

*And since they are the bosses, they will be like... If for example, I made a mistake, unknowingly – it might not even be a mistake, but they think it’s a mistake, and then I give back and say, it’s not a mistake, it’s actually like that, but then they don’t want to accept that they are wrong or that they have made a mistake or that they have misunderstood something. They would not admit to it, but they would find other ways to come back to you, and point to you. “It’s not like you say, it’s like I say!” [Laughing].*
I could tell that this really bothered her. Ruci was not brushed off easily, and even though she would often laugh and make fun of the situations at work, this was different; I could see how she was profoundly annoyed by what she was telling us:

*The younger generation, Vishnu and I... Angang... We are separated by different departments, and in central desk, there are four or five of us who are in the same hierarchy. Then there are senior editors, then the subeditors, and the assistants. I gave a good headline, and it's my page, I am doing the page. And some other senior comes to check my page and suggest a better headline, so I will be like... That's good. I will edit the headline. And then I will go and submit the page to the deputy editor, and they will find the headline good, but still, just to humiliate you, they will tell you; ‘What kind of headline is this?’ Sometimes they might say, ‘What the fuck is this?’ Though it makes sense, they will still ask you, and I will say, I didn't give the headline. Ratsin'sir’ gave the headline, and then they will be like “Oooh, he gave it? Oh, then it's fine”. Immediately. If I gave the same headline, they would not appreciate it. But if the same headline was given by Ratsin, or some other, and they still didn't know, they will be like: ‘What is this?’ but then you tell them, no Ratsin gave this, and they will be like “Oh, acha acha [ok, ok]... It's fine”. This happens a lot. It makes you feel like you don't know anything. You start doubting your own work.*

When I asked other journalists too, they said the desk was the toughest place to work. Because the paper was going straight to print every night, the reporters worked under constant pressure. Whereas in the other editorial teams you would rarely see any loud fights, the desk would sometimes have disagreements that could be heard all over the newsroom. The senior reporters ruled over the junior reporters with iron fists – even the smallest mistakes could be met with extreme dismay. Apparently, however, the desk in Telangana Today was ‘nothing’ like the desk at other, bigger newspapers, and even if Ruci and Vishnu said there was pressure, they believed that working in Telangana Today was far better than working for newspapers such as the Times of India and Deccan Chronicle, bigger and more established media organizations.
The Bureau

Another team where the jargon was quite different to Tabloid was the Bureau. Sometimes their predilection of standing around each other’s computers and laughing at something, made them seem more like a group of males hanging out at a bar rather than someone at work. Instead of sitting at their desks, they would often cluster together in front of someone’s computer.

However, the ages of the reporters – and consequently, how they acted – differed quite widely. Some of the reporters were as young as twenty, coming straight from university, whereas the majority were around forty. The older reporters were the ones who definitely took up the most ‘space’ – and evidently felt entitled to do so, too. Whereas the younger reporters would stand in groups outside the office, the senior reporters clustered together inside, hanging about in the office. In India the authority of elders is key, and behavior within the family marks the hierarchy; “respect for those senior is demanded: sons respect fathers and older brothers” (Mines & Lamb, 2010, p. 19). Having grown up with this belief, the young reporters acted more subdued, and even though they took part in the friendly banter, they rarely initiated it. The ruling of those senior however depended on their job position. Some of the designers in the team, for example, were older than the youngest reporters, but due to their position within the work hierarchy, they were not given the same respect as the senior reporters. Thus, the authority did not only depend on age, but also their social status within the office.

Due to the political ownership of Telangana Today, the reporters in the Bureau were well aware that their main job was to write articles about the positive developments that TRS had contributed to. Thus, the Bureau – being the team who wrote about these events – had an important job. The reporters in many ways knew what they had signed up for before coming to Telangana Today, and if they messed up – going against the owner’s wishes – they knew they would not have a place to come back to. There was in other words a lot of pressure resting on the shoulders of these reporters, but on the other side, more admiration from others came with it.
Sharjeel, who in fact started his career in Tabloid but was later shifted to the Bureau, preferred writing about art and culture. In the Bureau, however, he had to follow strict guidelines: most of the articles about culture or art had a political undertone, and often, he would report on events where the political party TRS had done something positive for Hyderabad’s cultural scene. Sometimes, he told me, it almost felt as if he wrote commercial pieces for TRS, and even though the journalists in the Bureau would sometimes write a negative piece about the developments of TRS, they only did this in order to uphold the view that Telangana Today was not “completely bought” and that the journalists indeed had integrity.

Henceforth, all of the journalists at Telangana Today recognized that the Bureau, which had the biggest readership (although no exact numbers proved it) and whose main task was to write articles supporting the TRS party, was often seen as the most important editorial division of the newspaper. Apart from the actual reporting, the male reporters had not done anything specific to claim their preeminent position within the office. Being a hardcore reporter simply made them the top of the ladder. Hence the social ordering was in many ways made even before the reporters stepped inside the office just by being part of a certain social group. On the other side, they nevertheless upheld the structure by acting in a way that correlated with their expected outward behavior; loud and fierce. Seemingly appreciating the dominant role, they acted as they were expected to in order to sustain their acquired social position. Their social roles were in other words preexistent, and the reporters, when stepping in to them, acted as they were expected to.

With their high social positions, however, came also pressure. Because the reporters in the Bureau knew that they were writing about what the owners of Telangana Today placed the highest importance on, they knew that if they in any way wrote something in which he disliked, they would be shown straight to the door. Shrinivas, the main editor, and Lalith, the editor in the Bureau, knew this, and therefore made sure all their reporters wrote about exactly what they wanted. As such, the reporters in the Bureau might well have had a higher social position, but they also had to deal with far more pressure – also in the sense of how they expressed themselves. Lalith and Shrinivas were the ones to decide, and thus, they never tried crossing the line.
Sharjeel, for example, knew he had to write about what the editor told him, and did not test his limits.

**Sameness**

Seeing how the two other editorial teams differ quite widely from Tabloid, it is clear that no teams shared a single safe space as Tabloid did. All the reporters in Tab were around the same age and worked with more or less the same stories. In the Bureau, the reporters’ ages differed quite widely, and the older reporters were granted far more room. In the desk for editing and proofreading, too, it was the older reporters who were at the top of the ranking system.

Ranking patterns within Telangana Today are connected to value, as the men in the Bureau – who write about the themes that are seen as having the highest value – are those who claim the most institutional power. However, after being familiarized with the women in Telangana Today, I suggest that value is not the only thing that affects the hierarchy *per se*; the situation is more diverse than a Dumontian model would imply. The ranking patterns within the walls of Telangana Today are not only based on which editorial team writes about what – it is also dependent on systems of authority *within* the different editions. The individual journalists in Tabloid, despite writing about topics seen as having less value, are nevertheless women who are active decision-makers.

What makes Tabloid so different from the other teams is how they all include and support each other. In Tabloid, it is not only the younger women who support each other, but all the women within the team, saying something about the tight bond they have developed between them. In the other teams – such as the Bureau and the desk – there is a more hierarchical divide, making the reporters within those teams feel less safe, constantly contested and more prone to feeling like underdogs. Ammu Joseph (2005) writes that “women working together tend to create a different atmosphere,

---

3 Here, I am drawing on Parkin’s (2002) discussion of Louis Dumont, a leading scholar of hierarchy and value.
especially when the boss is also a woman” (2005, p. 250). Women who work in
female-dominated spaces “report a similar, warm atmosphere, in which lasting
friendships were forged and intimacies – not to mention lunch – was shared” (p. 250).

Because the women working in Tabloid deal with news seen as ‘less important’, they
might seem to be ‘underdogs’. But in fact, the strong social bonds they share mean
they feel less pressure from hierarchical divisions and more encouraged to challenge
them, as seen in the example of seizing the TV remote. There is, in fact, a lot of
power in the hands of the women in Tabloid. In terms of what they are writing about,
they might seem inferior to the other reporters in ‘harder’ news, but the way they
always felt together made them feel safe enough to also go against established rules
within the office. The reporters in the Bureau did not always dominate the space as
much as they liked to believe. As in the situation with the TV-remote showed, Somya
could claim space to deny conformity to the dominant group’s wishes.

The ‘safe space’ within Tabloid is not completely protected from outside forces. The
open setting within the newsroom made a constant engagement with other editorial
teams possible – with the dominant group of male reporters constantly trying to
maintain their power. Sometimes it almost felt as if the ‘female force’ within Tabloid
annoyed the reporters for no reason at all, and according to Collins (1999) “dominant
groups may react negatively to the formation of a group free of their gaze and
control.” (cited in Wallin-Ruschman & Patka, 2016, p. 321). Male reporters tried to
express their structural control often as they could, but, as seen in the introduction,
they did not always succeed at being dominant. Working with the women of Tabloid,
I learned to feel like we were a gang, working together against a ‘dominant other’ and
ultimately for a larger cause. Safe spaces are often formed when there is an outside,
threatening ‘other’, and thus, being in the office made the women feel more aligned
with each other.

Seeing how the women fought against the ‘dominant other’, we may ask – perhaps
more importantly – what the women fought for. What was their larger cause? And
what does a ‘safe space’ lead to? First of all, by supporting their editor, Shanti, who
they see as one of themselves, and not just a boss, the women in Tabloid end up
making their jobs better. The support they receive from Shanti is crucial to them, and
because they treat her as a friend, with respect and admiration, they consequently enhance their chances of getting their own wishes recognized, too. They know they have Shanti’s support, and thus creating better chances of acting independently and make their own choices. Journalism is, after all, about stating your own opinions, and thus the degree of someone’s agency is a big part of any journalistic career. The ‘safe spaces’ that the women in Tabloid have shaped definitely enhance their abilities to act in accordance with what they want. Using their own methods, like waiting for the deadline to pass before handing in an article they know does not fit the ‘soft’ news category directly, are one of the strategies women in Tabloid use to gain their agency and voice in the newsroom. I will explore these strategies further in chapters three and four.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have outlined the most important social spheres within the newsroom and how they act in relation to each other. I have chosen to focus on the youngest employees in each editorial team, and how they interact with their colleagues, in order to create an understanding of the spaces within Telangana Today and, more importantly, the ground rules. In so doing, I suggest that the seating space and the “nature of social interaction” (Ardener, 1993) is important when explaining the rules that apply to the different social actors, and that within those particular spaces – the editorial ‘territories’ – the rules depend on those present. In a newsroom where the seating-areas are side-by-side, the ‘ground rules’ in one editorial board are constantly affected by the rules in another editorial board, creating an interesting social map where the power depends not only on the assigned seating space, but also, the social actors and their presence. Goffman (1979) suggests that “the division and hierarchies of social structure are depicted microecologically, that is, through the use of small-scale spatial metaphors” (Goffman cited in Bounia, 2017, p. 155). The TV in the introduction of this chapter is a great example of a small scale metaphor – in one way, it is just a TV, but when describing where it is situated and who controls it, it is not just a TV, it’s an artifact with rules of use that are bounded and shaped by the social actors therein. Yes, space speaks – and in the words of Ardener (1993), “the ‘theatre
of action to some extent determines the action” (p. 2). With all the other editorial teams facing the Bureau at the center, the space within Telangana Today clearly affects the social interactions that unfold. Working in Telangana Today, I came to see how different dimensions of space – the physical office layout, the social dimensions within and between editorial divisions, and the proxemics of personal interactions – all help shape each other.

When Ruci describes all the youngsters in the newspaper as being in the same hierarchy, there is an important divide between her and her colleagues in Tabloid: she is part of an editorial team that does not have the same safe space as they do in Tabloid. Yes, the women in Tabloid are also young, and often seen inferior to the older, hardcore journalists, but the women in Tabloid are able – and more importantly, dare to cross the hierarchical divisions due to the safe space of which they are part. In many ways, the women in Tabloid have a safety net that the other youngsters don’t have. In the Bureau, Sharjeel knows that even though the hardcore reporters are high up on the ‘ladder’ of social importance, he is still under pressure by having to write about the ‘harder’ news. Similarly, Ruci knows that despite her annoyance with her editors, she is not able to tell them. Both Ruci and Sharjeel are low on the hierarchical ladder, as the women in Tabloid are too, but Ruci and Sharjeel don’t have a safe space in order to overcome the barriers that are placed upon them.

I believe that when analyzing gender relations, it is “through the mundane practices of everyday life that much of the structuring and playing out of gender hierarchies take place” (Lamb, 2000, p. 184). Seeing how the different journalists interact, and by comparing the different teams together, I have shown how women in Tabloid, when being part of an intimate, shared space, are able to write what they want and also, feel ‘safe’ in an environment where most youngsters are constantly pressured by other, more experienced journalists. The women in Tabloid interact at a more friendly level and share a greater degree of intimacy with each other. Being part of a separate space enables the women to be more supportive and understanding. Safe spaces are, in other words, not only crucial to the establishment of an intimate and friendly atmosphere, but also reinforce the social power of the members therein. Shanti, “by reaching out to the personal side of each person” has managed to bring out the best in her female
employees (Joseph, 2005, p. 253) that also allows her team to come together and challenge the current power structures in Telangana Today.
Chapter Three: Soft Women, Soft Voices

As last chapter was about the unique shared community in Tabloid, I will now focus on the outcomes of sharing such a space. At first glance it may seem as if the attributes are rather trivial, but I shall in the following section argue that it is precisely the seeming triviality which helps create a larger vibe, a general sense that women can develop freedom of expression and enhanced agency. When looking at safe spaces, one thing is what they do, but more importantly, I believe, is to look at they things they may lead to. How are women in Tabloid affected by safe spaces?

In the previous chapter, I argued that the editor in Tabloid, Shanti, is good at cultivating spaces. Due to the close-knit milieu, the women in Tabloid felt safe, enabling them to act more freely and take independent choices. Safe spaces, in other words, enhanced agency. In this chapter, I will further explore the meaning of agency, and what chances women have of being heard within the newsroom. For the women in Tabloid, ‘voice’ means several things – either as vocal quality, as agency and representation or as character. Because women in India often are taught not to speak up, women are, already before they enter the office, trained to ‘keep their voices down’. “Kam bolo, dheere bolo” – speak less, speak softly. The women in Tabloid thus tended to speak at a low volume, unlike their male colleagues who spoke in loud, boisterous voices. What strategies, then, do women use to develop effective ‘voices’ in contexts where they are expected to subordinate their voices to men’s? Were they able to say what they wanted?

I argue that safe spaces are ultimately a strategy to give women voice. Even though women in Tabloid tended to speak in lower voices than their male colleagues, I will in this section argue that they used their voices differently – echoing their inner beliefs not through spoken words, but written. I will describe how the women in Tabloid used their inner voices as an important tool of overcoming the gender-related barriers, and how this proved to be a way of enhancing empowerment and agency. I will draw on, and pull together, the different senses of voice, and show how women speak softly to be seen as proper women, and in doing so have succeeded in creating a safe space.
within the newsroom wherein they can write the texts they want to write, and make sure those texts reach the general public.

**Chup Karo or Chup Raho (Shut Up or Be Quiet)**

The monsoon had arrived in Hyderabad. It was June, and raining cats and dogs. Aien (Angang’s cousin) heated up her evening chai while trying to dry the floor after the kitchen door had started leaking, and Ruci, Angang and I were sitting around the kitchen table looking out on the downpour. As the three of us were discussing how girls are brought up in India, Ruci told us a story from when she was little. Perhaps reminded of the incident by the pool of water on the floor, she told us about the time she was caught in a drain. I already knew her parents were artists, and that she grew up in Nagaland, North-East India – where Angang and Aien was from, too – but I had no idea that they owned a little restaurant, and that Ruci used to help out her parents there. Every night, after the guests had left, they would wash the restaurant with water – pouring huge buckets out on the floor. Normally most the water would drain away, but some of it would always be stuck, creating a little pool. Ruci, who claimed to be particularly clumsy when she was smaller, said she always fell into the drain. One time it happened she remembered particularly well.

“I was so clumsy, you know. Always fell into that thing. And then one night, as I was carrying something, I fell into the water. But this time, there were still guests. My dad came to pull me out of the water, and I remember having that... You know... When you really want to cry, but you’ve done something in public, like fallen or something, and you’re trying to hold it in? I remember my dad, how he stood there, just looking at me. I have been taught to keep quiet and not cry: He said to me, “Don’t cry, don’t make a sound”. “Chup Raho!” he said, you know, not to make a sound. And so I was trying reeaally hard to be quiet”.

- Ruci
In India generally there is a sense that the “public” is always watching, and thus, protecting one’s honor and person is of paramount importance in the “imaginative universe within which (...) acts are signs” (Geertz, 1973, p. 13). When stepping into the limelight of other’s gaze – especially men – women are expected to be ‘good women’. The correct way to do this is, culturally, to show “proper, modest feminine behavior (Seizer, 2000, p. 98).

Speaking in a low or lower voice is one of the ways to show modest feminine behavior. Deepa Naryan, a female journalist who in 2018 interviewed over 600 men and women about femininity in India, saw how many Indians raise girls with the central goal of making them silent. Parents teach their girls to be ‘sober’, a word indicating someone “who is quiet, serious, unsmiling, walking a straight path and not getting into trouble” (Naryan, 2018, p. 57). A ‘sober girl’ is a marriageable girl; by becoming silent, girls grown into women, showing they are ready to respect and listen to their husbands.

Because women have learned throughout their lives how to talk, stand, walk and behave, they “internalize society’s gaze” which tells them how to be ‘good women’ (Phadke et al, 2011). Often the women I worked with in Tabloid told me how they had constantly been taught how to act, how to do gender. Whereas men have a much more open arena in terms of what they can and cannot do in public, women are under constant scrutiny. This constant self-surveillance constructs what Michael Foucault refers to as ‘disciplined bodies’. Foucault argues that in “public spaces like prisons, hospitals and asylums, where people are constantly watched by those in authority, the subjects” – journalists, inmates – “no longer have to be monitored as they begin to monitor themselves” (Foucault 1995, cited in Phadke et al, 2011, p. 32). This produces a self-monitoring and “self-censuring system that Foucault describes as ‘disciplined bodies’” (Foucault, 1995).

Women are told that if they must speak, they must speak softly. A girl who is soft, is also feminine, and most importantly, has learned to discipline her body. I remember when we were watching the royal wedding and how Angang looked at Priyanka Chopra, a Bollywood superstar and said, “She really knows how to carry herself. She’s not loud, she’s not out there, you know. I like her”. Similarly, when speaking to
friends when dancing salsa, a couple of my male friends were referring to some of the girls as ‘too loud and outgoing’. Viv Groskop (2019) writes in a comment in The Guardian that:

“In everyday life, there is still something uncomfortable for a woman about being called loud, because the implications is that a) you don’t care about the people around you (otherwise, why are you making them feel uncomfortable) and b) you don’t care what other people think about you. To allow yourself to be loud as a woman is to be borderline psychopathic – to switch off your empathy and your emotional intelligence – to love the sound of your own voice, to take up too much space” (Groskop, 2019).

This was also common among the women in Tabloid. Speaking too loud signified a woman journalist who did not know how to ‘carry herself’, someone rude. Angang explained that by speaking up, others would come to know of your private matters, and (as a result), they would start thinking negatively about you. Besides, speaking out loud within the office was seen as the act of someone who lacked empathy – just as Groskop (2019) describes – someone who did not respect others. Thus all conversations had a low volume, and messages about what headline to fix or what page to look at was delivered in utter silence. Even though I sometimes sat right next to Angang, I struggled hearing what she said, and always when Shanti asked us something, I had to get it repeated from someone sitting next to me. Shanti spoke incredibly silently, and in many ways, acted how a modest, feminine woman should act: she spoke in a low, subtle voice, and when giving instructions, she never raised her voice, but rather, called people over to her desk to tell them carefully. Shanti told me how she was careful not to raise her voice too much as it would ‘disturb others’, again referring to the need to respect others around her.

Private matters, dinners, and so on, were always agreed upon in the quiet corners of Telangana Today, whispering words of ‘what bar to meet at’ or ‘where to meet after work’. It was as if they were arranging secret meetings, though the whole group of women in Tabloid were usually included, or at least knew about, what was happening. Again they shared something they did not include the others outside their team in. It might seem like these events only were spoken silently about because they involved
alcohol or partying, but the silent words seemed to be rooted in something else. Inside the office, the other editorial teams symbolized the public – they became the “imaginative universe which [women’s] acts are signs” (Geertz, 1973, p. 13). Women needed to protect their honor, and a way of doing this, was to act discreet. This played out in many social situations, but was particularly noticeable in the office.

Then again, even though the women in Tabloid tended to speak at low volume, they struggled to laugh equally low. Because the safe space within Tabloid was built upon trust and friendship (as described in chapter 2), humor was indeed an inherently important thing. Even Shanti – despite her composed way of being – would sometimes laugh so much she would lean her head backwards and giggle. As soon as the team laughed, it did however not go unnoticed. Male reporters – especially in the Bureau – would start staring, and sometimes, if they laughed louder than what was seen appropriate, the editor in the Bureau, Lalith, would stand up and look at them intensely. The female reporters instantly held their tongues. Even Shanti, when laughing out loud, was given looks from Lalith’sir’, and the few times he looked at her, she seemed to think she had crossed a line and looked deeply embarrassed:

“When I raise my voice sometimes, like he... Earlier, there was some kind of divide between the desk which they have now removed, but even when that was there, if I raised my voice, he would just get up and stand there, or if we were creating a ruckus, he would just get up and look at us, what are we doing-kind of thing, I mean you unconsciously think I shouldn’t raise my voice, I should be more careful, I should be more in control of my temperament, because that’s why I am here”.

Shanti here describes how keeping control of your temperament is a part of having a low and soft voice, though interestingly, she is not in any way angry with her employees in the described situation – on the contrary, she is joking and having a good time. When saying she shouldn’t raise her voice, she is implying that creating noise and having a good time is something negative – Lalith has in other words every right to tell her off. Noise was noisy, no matter the reason. When the male editors in the Bureau made noise, and joked – something they often did – they were on the other hand never told to be quiet. This was a crucial difference between men and women;
not only in terms of how they were supposed to act, but also, what consequences they received when behaving in a way not complying with expected behavior.

Men, on the other hand, did not have to follow the same guidelines. They spoke openly about the press club, and how late they had been out and about. ‘Loud’ was simply not a word used to describe men – it was just ‘men being men’. When I interviewed with Balu, one of the older reporters in the Bureau, who had recently returned for the US, he said:

Balu: We are the loudest. I think we just enjoy ourselves, we are cracking jokes at each other, we are making fun of the amount of work we have to do, so… it makes it easier. And we find the most serious of things to be funny. We just have fun.

We don’t care, unless someone comes and tells us we are really noisy. Then we are like, so what?

Louise: But does it happen, that someone will tell you that [you are noisy]?

Balu: No. No, we are… all of us are quite old. We are not insulting anyone else when we are laughing or cracking a joke, we are not saying anything that’s hurtful to anyone, we are just making fun of the things we are doing.

Especially when watching cricket or other matches on TV, some of the male reporters would cheer intensely and undoubtedly disturbed others around them. When asking the female reporters in Tabloid whether they found this annoying, the group split in two. Some women believed that because the male reporters usually went out on late-night events and were supposedly tired when arriving work at 7PM, their boisterous attitude allowed them to ‘feel energized again’, similarly to the reporters at the desk who started screaming when approaching the deadline. In other words, their behavior was, if not understood, then at least warranted. Others did find their behavior annoying but chose not to explicitly tell them.

Vishnu, who worked at the desk, explained to me how women in India are taught already from a young age to speak softly:
Vishnu: “Since you were a kid you were asked to... Lower your voice, don’t talk loudly!” We cannot laugh loudly, we cannot joke loudly...

Louise: But during the day you often joke?

Vishnu: Yes, but... It’s different. Usually when the match happens, maybe you also have noticed the same thing... They scream, they shout, they clap. But women basically, maybe that is their nature, or how they are brought up, that they are not supposed to do that kind of thing”.

Louise: Why?

Vishnu: Well, if you look back at Indian history and culture, it is very sexist. Women have never been given that much importance, whereas men always have been the epitome of everything.

Any examination of gender must consider the presence of patriarchy, and the dominant expectation in India is that the man has more power than that of the woman within the family. Lamb and Mines (2010, p. 77) suggest that Hindu sacred texts legitimize the idea that a “husband is in some ways to his wife like a god, and that his wife should serve and respect him”. Many women transmit their membership from one family to another – first, they are daughters, and later on, after marriage, they become wives and daughters-in-law; later still, they become mothers and mothers-in-law. Throughout this time, it is in most cases the male – either her father or her husband – who is in control of the major decisions affecting the family (Lamb and Mines, 2010). A way to serve your husband is to listen to him. Always listening to your husband is a way of showing him respect, and thus, some families believe that it is the man who should speak the most.

In Telangana Today, men transferred their authority within the house to the newsroom: not only did they speak loud, but they also acted unrestrained, as ‘gods’ who never had someone to tell them to quiet down. They did what they pleased – either it was cheering at cricket or discussing the latest news, or just having fun, as
Balu narrated. As seen in chapter 2, some men from the Bureau were used to act and do whatever they pleased, and were not happy to be argued with. When asking Sharjeel, one of the reporters in the Bureau about this, he explained how most of the men were not used to having to adjust their attitude in order to respect others – rather, when being loud, they signified themselves as competent and fierce reporters – someone with authority. In society, women gain respect by acting soft, whereas men gain respect by acting loud.

Especially in terms of journalism, these structures sometimes seemed hard to combine. Women journalists, when entering a field dominated by men, are often afraid that they will not be heard if they do not adopt the stereotypical male characteristics of male reporters (hard, boisterous, loud) and thus end up struggling to know how to guide themselves through which rules and regulations to follow: should they follow the gender dynamics broadly common in society, or the gender dynamics that are specific to the culture of a newsroom? Of course, parts of newsroom culture are reflections of a broader culture within Indian society, but when speaking of general newsroom culture seen as masculine, women may find it particularly hard to adjust. In a large-scale research project in the 1980’s, Dutch female journalists “observed many masculine features in journalism to which they felt they had to adjust in order to be accepted as ‘real’ journalists” (Zoonen cited in Carter et al, 1998, p. 33).

However, because women in Tabloid occupy a separate space, even though being housed in the main newsroom, the reporters in Tabloid are not writing about the same issues as the men in the Bureau, and thus they are not needed to be accepted as ‘real’ journalists in the same way as women working alongside men in the same sections of the newsroom. They share, as described in chapter 2, a safe space, and hence, instead of needing to adjust to a completely masculine newsroom culture, the women in Tabloid rather has to guide themselves through the feminine, ‘safe’ space culture within Tabloid and the broader newsroom culture that they also are part of, something I will now turn to.
A curtain of silence and politeness

When referring to the loud men in the Bureau, there are of course exceptions. As earlier mentioned, the behavior of the male reporters both depended on age and position. Lalith, the editor, was not in any way loud – in fact, he was particularly quiet. He spoke extremely quietly, an every time I came over to speak to him, I actually never heard what he said. You would think he moved around the office on a flying carpet, as he would just appear without anyone actually having seen (or heard) how he arrived. Similarly to Shanti, Lalith gave orders to the other reporters as cool as a cucumber.

There is however a fundamental thing that parted the two editors: whereas Shanti would instantly calm her employees if laughing out loud, Lalith would not. Similarly, when the women in Tabloid spoke or laughed out loud, they would instantly get looks or comments from the male reporters, whereas when the reporters acted boisterous, nothing happened. Even though the women in Tabloid laughed quieter, softer and also fewer times, they were nonetheless told to stop. The men in the Bureau, on the other hand, laughed louder, harder and more often, but were not told to stop. Who had given the men carte blanche? I believe the reason lies within the hierarchical structures, and the tendency that women “occupy relatively powerless social positions” (O’Barr & Atkins, 1998, p. 401). Because the women held a lower position (at least seen in the eyes of Lalith’sir’ and the men in the Bureau), the men were subsequently allowed to tell them to be quiet. Being ‘hardcore’ reporters, they may have felt that their ‘higher’ position simply allowed them to guide others on how to act.

Even though the women in Tabloid were part of a safe space, they were also part of a broader newsroom culture, and the idealized notions of womanhood thus allowed the men to regulate how women “should (…) speak, sing and hold themselves” (Weidman, 2007, p. 133). Just as men are transferring their authority from within the house to the newsroom, the ‘public eye’ in which women are judged in public is transferred to the newsroom, too. Their feminine behavior was assessed as it would be outside in public, if not more extensively; bars and nightclubs were often arenas
where women could express themselves more freely, and where the public rarely would not able to react to ‘negative behavior’ in other ways but to stare. Within the walls of Telangana Today, men could dictate not only their behavior, but in theory also their career. Of course, the women knew that they would never lose their jobs if speaking too loud, but being seen as someone dishonorable would of course lessen their chances of climbing the hierarchical ladder or being promoted.

There were of course times when women too argued loudly, especially at the desk, but the important distinction is that women were explicitly told to lower their voices, or received visible attention if blatantly stepping out of the assigned gender attributes placed upon them. The men, on the other hand, occupied a much freer role when deciding how to behave: Lalith was quiet and silent because he wanted to, not because he was expected to, whereas many of the women in Tabloid tended to be silent not because they wanted to, but because they indeed were expected to. Women’s voices where, in other words, appropriated by others – not by themselves.

However, because women are taught, over and over again, not to speak, many girls thus stand behind a curtain of politeness and silence. They become “their own self-editing, self-censoring and self-monitoring systems” (Naryan, 2018, p. 67). This is the kind of self-monitoring analyzed influentially by Michel Foucault in his work on discourse, power, and bodies, as Lamb (2007: 182) summarizes it, Foucault shows “that distinctively modern forms of power do not emanate from some central source of sovereign figure, but circulate throughout the entire social body via the most minute and pervasive everyday ‘micropractices’,” such as habits, movements and self-surveillance (Lamb, 2007, p. 182, in reference to Foucault 1973, 1975, 1979, 1980, 1980b, 1980c). These ‘micropractices’ can also be understood as someone’s voice – and perhaps more importantly, how voices are socially constructed and amended. Women are taught to train their bodies – always making sure one’s voice fits within the social milieu. Voice, especially lowering your voice was, in other words, bodily training.

Even if women are not told explicitly to be quiet by their family or by someone around them, they still are – because acting soft is a way of following the cultural codes in parts of Indian society. I here emphasize ‘parts’ – these cultural codes vary
extensively, and of course, depend on the family. Sometimes, girls are trained to be quiet, whereas in other cases, they speak just as loud or act just as outgoing as the males. Manvi, for example, who had been working in Tabloid for almost two years, told me during her interview that she thought the women in Tabloid spoke ‘incredibly soft’ and that she often struggled to hear what they said. At home her whole family spoke loud, and the first months had been demanding, as she constantly had to contain herself not to speak loudly. However, after working in Tabloid for almost two years now, she too succumbed to the soft behavior seen appropriate for women. Similarly, Bhawna, a full-time reporter in Tabloid, struggled to fit in to the ‘quiet milieu’, and Shanti often described how she needed to tell her to slow down and to lower her voice.

“Sometimes we do feel a little bit awkward when the designers are sitting there, and we need to talk about certain things and we have to keep lowering our voices, I keep telling people: Ok girls, just chill, low your voice, don’t scream..., Lets talk slowly. Bhawna especially, she gets excited and her voice rises so high and I have to keep telling her: Bhawna, slow down! Lower your voice-kind of thing”

- Shanti

Women thus become not only self-censoring in terms of themselves, but also others. Shanti, who did not only expect the women in Tabloid to speak softly, also hushed at them if they were not. As their ‘mother’ (as she sometimes referred to herself) she saw herself as authorized to pass on comments on how to adjust their behavior. Similarly, even though Bhawna would sometimes be asked to keep quiet, she would equally ask me and other girls around her to lower their voices, re-creating and pushing the guidelines onto others whereas not always wanting to follow them herself. Again it becomes clear that the women in Tabloid are dealing with an interesting conflict – taking place not only around them and within the office, but also in themselves. In one way, they have strong opinions they want to express and show others, but on the other side, they are constantly told – and also tell – to subdue themselves if they want to be taken seriously.
Similarly, this conflict is not only visible at work, but also at home – where the girls are often louder and much more outgoing than they are inside the office. Even in the cab home I sometimes saw how Keertana and Angang would instantly change, having loud discussions or singing to the music in the car. Here they had no one to guide them or to tell them to be quiet. I particularly remember how I visited Angang and Aien when Angang’s mother had come to Hyderabad to visit her two daughters. Meeting her mom for the first time made me somehow stressed out, and – perhaps especially unfortunate in an Indian context – when I am stressed out, I tend to speak a lot, as if I am afraid that a moment of silence will reveal how nervous I really am, and so, I spoke non-stop. Words kept flowing out of my mouth and Angang’s mother who did not speak a lot of English, sat there nodding eagerly if not somewhat surprised. Afterwards, when speaking to Angang, I apologized for speaking ‘too much’. I remember how she looked at me, laughing: “No, no! In this house there is freedom of speech! Or of voice! So now you can finally speak as loud as you want!”

Angang highlights how she feels there is a clear divide between speaking at home and at work. At home her self-monitoring systems were, to a certain extent, turned off, and she could finally ‘show’ her inner self. Goffman (1969) describes how, within the walls of every social establishment, we “find a team of performers who cooperate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation” (p. 231). How each performer acts, depend on the audience and the assumed ethos of those watching. The audience is however not allowed to access the ‘backstage’ – only the performers are. In many ways, one may argue that women in Telangana ‘performed’ a specific way of being – acting quiet, invisible and soft. The office was their front stage where they needed to ‘hide’ their true self, but as soon as they entered the backstage – their apartments, cabs, or nightclubs, they were not expected to ‘put on a show’. They would however never be too outgoing in public, and it was always within the house it seemed as if they could really talk and act however they pleased. This shift was especially seen in Angang, who was exceptionally quiet at work, but as soon as she
came back home, she would sing – sometimes karaoke – with the volume much louder than any of us would dare to anywhere public.

Because women are needed to constantly subdue themselves inside the office, it felt as if as soon as they stepped out, the greater need they had to be loud and outgoing. I too can recognize that feeling after hours at the library – playing loud music, singing or in some way doing something that makes you feel more ‘alive’ and awake again. When sitting somewhere contained for hours, it is easy to feel trapped, almost imprisoned, as being part of a space that has powers over you in which you cannot do anything about. Maybe there was some truth to what some of the women felt as to why the reporters in the Bureau always spoke loud because they wanted to keep ‘energized’. Then again, even though the women in Tabloid might have been equally tired after working for several hours when the reporters in the Bureau arrived, they nevertheless chose to spoke quietly at work.

**Feminization of Spaces in Media**

So far I have described how women in Tabloid spoke softer and in many ways acted more subdued than their male colleagues. Unlike the male reporters in the Bureau, they were also told – both by people outside the editorial team, such as other male reporters and by Lalith, and also by Shanti, their own editor – to act in such a way. Many of the women in Tabloid explained to me that they spoke softer because they showed respect for others working, but interestingly, they were not given the same respect by the surrounding male reporters, who made as much noise as they themselves saw fit. There is, clearly, a divide between how women and men in Telangana Today are allowed – and also – allow themselves to act. The women in Tabloid are not acting soft to please the men around them *per se*, but they are, perhaps in fear of acting too differently to the idealized notions of womanhood, nevertheless more subdued at work than they are privately.

Their voices are, in other words, softer. Returning to Goffman’s argument about backstage and front stage behavior, Telangana Today is the front stage for women in
Tabloid. Here they have to act a certain way in order to comply with the main facets of feminine behavior: quietly and subdued. However, as I argued in chapter 2, we have seen how safe spaces are interesting platforms of social organization, where members of such spaces feel entitled to push against dominating groups due to their safe environment. Do the women in Tabloid however feel ‘safe’ when they are visibly acting more subdued than their male counterparts? Why do they follow the social strata that they are expected to when they are clearly not doing so in other social platforms (at home, in nightclubs etc.)? How can they then be identified as vehicles of empowerment and agency when a central tenet of voice and the speaker’s perceived agency happens only when the speaker is really heard?

In associating agency only with the spoken voice of the speaking subject, we however forget a crucial part, as “this conception of the voice ignores the potential agency of listeners” (Weidman, 2007, p. 137). In order to understand someone’s level of agency, we cannot only look at what they say, but also, at how they say it and to whom. Who where the women in Tabloid speaking to? Following the guidelines of Shanti and the other male reporters around them might have made them seem more subdued within the office, as they in many ways had to ‘put on a show’ coming to work, but on the other hand, did it matter to them that they could not show their ‘true self’ within the office? Following the narrative accounts of the women in Tabloid, I believe they acted more cunningly than they might seem at first sight. Yes, they spoke and acted softer, but they were not soft. In India, journalism is seen as a bold career choice, and I remember how I received comments such as ‘wow, you are so tough’ or ‘you are super strong’ every time I told someone I worked as a journalist. Similarly, when Ruci told the story about being stuck in the drain, Angang said:

“*We might be more quiet in the office, but we are actually really powerful, strong women. We just don’t show it, but we write it*.”

Angang shows how we cannot only associate agency with spoken voice. She feels powerful because she is able to write what she wants, and thus, even though women way have seemed more subdued within the office walls, they are not feeling as such themselves. In the words of Lamb (2000), “submission and silence (…) do not necessarily indicate an unequivocal, fully internalized compliance or modesty”.

53
(2000, p. 194). It may well be that women in Tabloid observe these structures – and comply with them – just enough to avoid criticism. For instance, Angang often told me how she ‘was happy to not talk about things others could judge her on, as long as she was able to write about the things she wanted’.

When writing about issues that they deeply cared about, and by using different techniques, which I will return to in the 4th chapter, they in other words worked around and were also “subtly challenging (…) the kinds of dominant ideologies” I have described thus far, both within society in general and also within the newsroom. (Lamb, 2000, p. 194). The women in Tabloid knew that for them, the most important thing was not whose voice had the most decibels, but who got published. Although low voices may have complied with the expected standard of how women should use their voices, the reporters in Tabloid nevertheless use alternative practices to challenge those standards: voicing their opinions through written articles. Their listeners were in other words not the male reporters around them; rather, it was the readers of Tabloid.

In an interview I conducted with Usha Raman, a female professor and journalist working on gender-related issues within media, about women and voice, she explained that when she started journalism in 1988, she remembered a lot of very strong women from those years, “but they tended to be loud”:

“I think they needed to be loud, because they weren’t recognized otherwise, they were usually dismissed. If you look at women journalists who are a little older than me, they were the first generations who headed sections of the newspaper. Not many of them became editors, but they at least were Bureau chiefs, led Sunday magazines, those sorts of things and they tended to be much more ‘out there’, much more visible. Maybe because there were so few of them”

- Usha Raman

Today there are far more female journalists, and as at Tabloid, some editorial teams even consist of women only. In light of what Raman reveals, is the reason for why the
women in Tabloid tend to speak softer not only about adhering to the dichotomies that are placed upon them, but also, about a change in the manifestations of newsroom behavior? Are women, because they are in higher numbers, simply allowed to be *female* without having to adopt to the stereotypical journalistic persona in order to be respected?

More women create a different culture within the newsroom. When women work together, there is “less tension and conflict about how much is organized”, and thus, delivering messages and telling each other who does what might simply not need anyone screaming – the women in Tabloid already know what they are supposed to do, and if not, they know they can always ask Shanti (Joseph, 2005, p. 254). In Tabloid they do not have to ‘put on a show’, here they are simply allowed to be women. Joseph (2005) writes that earlier, “one thought one had to desexualize oneself and be more like a man. But now you don’t have to play the male any more. You don’t have to deny the fact that you have a home or children” (p. 254). Of course, there is a slight contradiction here. In one way, female reporters in Tabloid tend to speak in lower voices, also when being inside the ‘walls’ of Tabloid. When saying they do not need to put on a show, I refer to their emotions and feelings – in Tabloid they are *allowed* to be women in the sense that they share an emotional bond and can express their own feelings and thoughts. What they however cannot do, are sharing these thoughts and feelings *loudly* – the women always make sure others won’t hear them. For one, they do not want other reporters to know about their private matters, and two – if blatantly stepping out of the gender politics within the newsroom – they get feedback, both from their own editor and the male reporters around them. As a consequence, women in Tabloid speak softly.

I however think there is more to this than meets the eye. When working in Tabloid, I was often taught by many of the women in Tabloid how to manage my body – how to speak, act and what not to talk about too loud, and so forth – but I was also taught how to *get around* these restrictions. In one of the main vignettes of chapter 4, I will describe how Angang got her article posted even though Monis, the editor in Tabloid at the time, tried to quash it. Angang knew she had a good starting point for an article, and even though she was told there was no point of writing about Wonder Woman, she still did. She did not openly voice her disagreement with Monis, but she did
however cross him by seeking permission from an editor higher up than him. Cheater (1999, p. 5) argues that “currently disempowered people can come some way towards achieving their goals precisely by not voicing their resistance” to them. Instead, by exercising some other capacity or resource, such as writing the article and thus speaking her mind anyhow, Angang shows how “patterns of domination can… accommodate… resistance… as long as… it is not publicly acknowledged…” (Scott, cited in Cheater, 1999, p. 5). Furthermore, “voice[s] under domination [includes] rumour, gossip, disguises, metaphors, and shaded in accordance with the degree of surveillance from the authority to which it is exposed, the particularity of oral culture allows it to carry fugitive meanings in comparative safety” (Scott, cited in Cheater 1990, p. 57). The female “gang” within Tabloid are using gossip (such as the Whats App group) and other mechanisms in order to overcome the power structures within Telangana Today. The safe space within the walls of Tabloid, as mentioned in chapter 2, is a strategy to overcome the barriers around them.

Women in Tabloid are part of a larger newsroom, where most of the decisions trickle down to the two male editors, and thus using low voices are “conscious and expedient strategies” deployed in order to get what they wanted. Though the women may appear to be meticulous about matters of voice, I believe that instead of not silently and compliantly accepting the “monolithic set of cultural values about the (…) dangerous dimensions of their (…) bodies”, they instead “critique, reinterpret, or resist such dominant ideologies through (…) everyday practices (Lamb, 2000, p. 194). The reason why women in Tabloid tend to speak more softly than men is in other words not only due to gender norms, but also that doing so allowed them to create a distinctively female space which gave them new liberties. In other words, the way women in Tabloid speak both play to stereotypes of feminine softness and submission and also thwart those stereotypes by giving women a space within the newspaper in which they can claim agency and express themselves to the public.

Because the main aim of many women in Tabloid is to write about important matters – after all, they are journalists – they have taught themselves how to manage their bodies to fit into a newsroom setting. When lowering their voices when being stared at by the men around them, they create an image that they are respectful and proper women. Using this image, the women get their articles published. In other words, they
enacted the behavior that the men around them expected of women. The newsroom in general is a space of loud and posturing men trying to control things, but women, understanding how the system works, have adapted to certain parts of this system while also challenging it. By carving out their own spaces within this larger space, the women in Tabloid have created a feminization of space within the newsroom.

We may however ask whether women in India are lowering their voices because that was what they saw fitted best, or if they simply, after internalizing their self-censoring monitors, don’t recognize that they actually are lowering their voices. In light of gender politics and women, there are of course – in any part of India – more social barriers placed upon women, and thus, all women – no matter how powerful or strong they are – need to combat these barriers. I however believe that the safe space around the women in Tabloid allow them to adapt to a different journalistic persona than the traditional ‘loud’ and ‘hard’ man. To assume that women who are seen as ‘soft’ by male peers are unable to write about ‘hard’ news is mistaken. It is also mistaken to draw too neat a dichotomy within the complexity of voice, between “having a voice and being silenced, (…) leaves us with little way of interpreting voices that are highly audible and public yet not agentive in a classical sense”; for instance, voices that have authored instead of sonic content may be of just as much worth (Weidman, 2007, p. 147), something I will now turn to.

**Loud (Inner) Voices**

Following Ortner’s (2006) argument, I believe “agency and social power in a relatively strong sense are very closely linked” (Ortner, 2006, p. 38). Agency refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and make their own, free choices, and thus, the relations of power that are shaped around the individual making these choices affect their perceived agency. Agency is, in other words about “acting within relations of social inequality, asymmetry, and force” (Ortner, 2006, p. 139). Interestingly, women in Tabloid, compared to other women in society in India in general, were often seen as ‘too public’, or badass because of their work, and some of the girls even feared the stigma from other family members of stepping out in the
world and beyond the gender constraints that they had grown up with. Journalism was not for the fainthearted and was often described as a ‘bold’ career choice (as earlier mentioned). Thus, even though the women in Tabloid might have succumbed to certain pressures within society – and inside the workplace, in particular, the ‘outside’ public saw them as tough, bold women.

As such, even though the female reporters in Tabloid might seem more contained and subvert than the males because they spoke softer, wrote about softer subjects and acted more or less softly, I argue that, seen in a broader setting, they are actually not. Being opinionated, for example, does not comply with the soft way of being. Naryan (2018) believes that because “girls are expected to only listen and follow, having opinions seems pointless” (p. 60). Having opinions are an expression of the self, and “indicates a fearlessness in drawing attention to that self”. (Naryan, 2018, p. 60). Female reporters – also those working in Tabloid, have blatantly stepped out of that soft characteristic, having not only strong opinions, but also presenting these to the wider public.

Keane (2000) argues that “research on voice directs attention to the diverse processes through which social identities are represented, performed, transformed, evaluated, and contested” (p. 271). There are two common ways in which voice is invoked: “one centers on political representation and authority, that is, “having a voice””. The other raises questions about relations among experience, identity and “point of view, as in “claiming one’s voice” (Keane, 2000, p. 271). Research shows how these two ways of using voice are not only about linguistic features, but can also be about voicing words in literary texts.

Not only do women in Tabloid ‘have a voice’, but they also ‘claim it’. Writing articles is a definite way of sharing your own opinions, and most of all, about being heard. As such, in any question addressing ‘who is speaking’, we also have to look at those listening to those speak. By using techniques in order to make sure their articles were pushed – even though they did not always comply with the guidelines of ‘soft’ news, the women made sure they were heard. Again, the listeners were not the men in the Bureau – it was the readership of Tabloid. Subsequently, the women may not have spoken in hard voices, but they nevertheless voiced opinions through written articles.
In such a way, they may not have been identified as ‘hard’ reporters, but they were ‘hard’ in other ways, especially when comparing them to women within Indian society as a whole. Many of the girls I interviewed felt they had to follow strict guidelines from the main editors on what to write about and not, like Moonis who tried to turn down Angang’s article, but by using techniques in order to overcome these barriers – such as handing in articles later than the deadline so that they just had to be pushed or (as Angang did), waiting for Shanti to arrive at work so that she could help her publish, were some of these techniques. Along these lines, women may not be perceived as ‘hard’ within the office per se, but they are using techniques in order to overcome the barriers placed upon them by the wider values and traditions within Indian media.

**Addressing Agency**

As of one of the main questions in this chapter is what being part of a soft space may lead to, I will now turn to the deeper meaning of voice and agency, and what it means for women in Tabloid.

Amanda Weidman, who has done research on stage goddesses and studio divas in South India, argue that it is problematic to assume that voice is only about ‘voice’ in a metaphorical sense. Weidman (2007) believes that “the model of the speaking subject as agent has always relied on using “voice” in a metaphorical sense, as a synonym for self-representation” (Weidman, 2007, p. 131). Such a model has always treated the voice as something secondary, a “mere vehicle of expression, something that has a sign of agency but has no power in itself” (Weidman, 2007, p. 131). In other words, she believes that a focus on the sonic voice itself, and how voices are audible in a social context, can provide a much more useful way of addressing agency, rather than looking at just what the voice is used for.

Weidman, in other words, argues that agency can be explained not only by looking at what and how things are said, but that auditory voice too, is connected to the notion of agency. In order to create a more complex understanding of agency, and how it is
connected to voice, Weidman (2007) maintains that it is the “interaction between voices themselves and communities as listeners” that may help us explain how someone’s voice is connected to agency (p. 35). In relation to the women in Telangana Today, Weidman provides interesting material to help us think through the meaning of sonic voice – as she believes it is in the sound of the voice that much of the agency is located. The voice is the vehicle of self.

How does this translate to the women in Telangana Today? Are they, because they are speaking in softer voices, not able to explicitly male themselves into vehicles of empowerment, self-representation and agency, even though they are writing the articles they want? First of all, I think Weidman’s approach is useful in that it shows how the spoken voice is important, and that there are important meaning attached to the sonic voice. On the other hand, when associating agency only with the speaking subject, it ignores the potential of the listeners – and, for the women in Telangana Today – this is crucial. We need to ask ourselves not only in what way or how loud they are speaking, but also, whom they are speaking to. The women in Tabloid found their work important because they could give voice to other women, and present women’s issues. They might not have told the men in the Bureau to be quiet or tell them off when they get comments on their behavior, but they nevertheless showed resistance in other ways – through gossip, agreeing on meeting privately and perhaps most importantly, writing articles that they wanted despite not always fitting in to the traditional ‘soft’ beats.

When asking the women how it made them feel when they got an article published which was not initially seen as soft, they explained how they felt empowered. Empowered because they had overcome traditional gendered expectations placed on women just by being journalists, and also, by voicing their opinions through written words. Empowerment is sometimes seen as a vague buzzword from the 1990s, one particularly associated with gender, women, and development. According to Cheater (1999), the term ‘empowerment’ seems above all to be about “being vocal, having a right to ‘voice’ (p. 4). The women in Tabloid might not use their voices loudly in term of making sounds, but they are nevertheless able to share personal thoughts and write about things they care about, and thus, I suggest that the women studied demonstrate that they perceive themselves as entitled to make their own decisions (in what to
write), and that writing articles has given them a tool to experience a feeling of empowerment. I in other words argue that what the female reporters wrote about were their vehicles of opinion.

Arguing that someone’s sonic voice was not important might however seem unethical. Their sonic voices are of course important, and naturally, the women in Telangana Today found it indubitably annoying to always adjust to the overarching patriarchal mechanisms within the newsroom – speaking in lower voices not to disturb anyone, being constantly shushed, when, they were in fact constantly listening to the loud voices of the other(s). In order not to come dangerously close to what Gayatri Spivak (1988) critiques when speaking of ideological underpinnings of subaltern voices, and that “the oppressed can know and speak for themselves” (1988, p. 34, found in Morris 2010). Even though Spivak refers to undermining someone’s voice in terms of a whole Indian group, the point is nevertheless the same: never speak for someone else – let them represent himself or herself in terms of intellectual subjects, and not by how they are perceived as intellectual subjects (or not). Such an approach, seeking to find how one should allow women’s voices to be heard, will rather end up removing “the feminist subject from the history of her production within interconnected axes of gender, race, class/caste, nation or sexuality” (Sinha, cited in Weidman, 2007, p. 137). I have no intentions of describing how the women are perceived inferior, rather, I want to look at the ways in which women “come into voice” (Sinha, cited in Weidman 2007), making it possible to identify the particular strategies by which women learned to speak “the voice of the Indian woman” (p. 137).

In discovering the female reporters’ ‘real’ voices, I have also pondered the relationship between the public voices of these women and if there really is such a thing as ‘real’ voices. During my interviews, I sometimes wondered whether the girls were able to say ‘what they really wanted’, both to me and to others. Maybe, because they in fact were seen as soft journalists, they had merely adapted to the dichotomies of the soft news categories, and writing human interest stories was something they had learned to like rather than initially liking it. Or, maybe they simply said what they thought I wanted to hear, as is the ‘danger’ in most anthropological research. When asking the female reporters directly about voice, some of them looked uncomfortable,
as if I was touching upon something they either had not yet thought about, or, something they did not really want to talk about. During the weeks I spent in Tabloid, ‘voice’ and at what volume the different reporters spoke, became something a lot of the reporters talked about, and after interviewing some of the men at the web-desk, the topic was also thoroughly discussed at an office-party I attended.

One of the male reporters at the desk believed that the women in Tabloid didn’t need to speak in lower voices because they were always working during the day. I remember Indrajeet’s face, how he looked like a know-it-all, claiming to know everything about why women spoke softer than men. Another female reporter, Manvi, heavily disagreed, saying it then made no sense to continue whispering as the other reporters in the Bureau arrived – rather, it made more sense if the women instead spoke louder. Some of the women clearly stated that there was no denying in the fact that there was a certain level of gender discrimination in Telangana Today, and that women both were expected to – and did – speak softly. Others, like Lekha, disagreed and said that speaking softly was simply how they were and had nothing to do with what was expected off them. We may then ask – as I earlier mentioned – whether women in India, many whom already from a young age have been taught to speak softly, are lowering their voices because that was what they saw fitted best, or if they simply, after internalizing their self-censoring monitors, don’t recognize that they actually are lowering their voices.

In my naïve search for women’s ‘real’ voices, it became clear to me that women’s voices and what volume they speak is not a definite, consistent ‘thing’. Rather, as Christine Walley shows in her work in East Africa, “girls’ voices shifted according to context depending on whether they were” at work, at home, or among friends (Walley, 1997, p. 411). Finding someone’s real voice is not about seeing how they are at a specific time of day, but taking the whole self into account. Returning to Goffman’s argument, it seems evident that “each self has a public as well as a private side and many more layers within it, from the conscious to the deeply unconscious” (Walley, 1997, p. 411).

It is also clear that the different interactions I have narrated are complex and full of nuances. In order to avoid unwarranted generalizations, I however focus on how
women perceive themselves, not on how they may seem outwards. If they perceive themselves as empowered and able to say what they want, I argue that they thus are. It is clear that all the women in Tabloid use their voices differently, and that women choose to follow the males’ expectation that they will speak with soft voices, but that women do this to gain a safe space within the newsroom, which in turn enables them to publish their articles – thereby gaining a much ‘louder’ public voice. Complying with men’s expectations about speaking softly in the newsroom is in other way an effective way for women journalists to make sure the public will hear them. Because the women in Tabloid feel like they are able to write what they want; they ‘have a voice’ and they are also ‘claiming that voice’. Being part of a safe space made women push the articles they wanted, and in such a way, they perceive themselves as able to take their own choices. The articles they write are thus the tools they have to enhance their agency.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have explained how women in Tabloid often tended to speak in a lower and softer way than their male colleagues. The gendered body politics illustrated in the narrative of Rucili, Angang and the other women in Tabloid, portray how girls growing up in India are often taught to act in certain ways. These expectations affect women both privately and publicly, and also extended to the newsroom. As a result, the women in Tabloid tended to speak in lower voices than their male colleagues. However, I argue that despite their low sonic voices, women in Tabloid use different techniques to overcome the behavioral regulations placed on them. Through written articles, they are able to express themselves. There are also clear ambiguities and nuances when identifying someone’s voices, but when focusing on how women perceive themselves, and not on how they are seen outwards (by their male colleagues, for example), I hope to avoid generalizations within the dense tangle of Indian gender politics.
The way to do this, I argue, is to look at not only the speaking subject, but also, the different characters that voice represent, and more importantly, how these voices then are used. When explaining how agency is created – it is rather, I argue, the opinions that are at the very core of someone’s voice, and thus, even though the women may not be perceived as hard within the office, they nevertheless act as ‘hard’ opinionaters in a different way. Their written pieces are not only a way of expressing opinions, but they are also, I believe, powerful tools that may lead to empowerment and enhanced agency. This is an important strategy for the women in Tabloid – a way of feeling they are not subordinate, but rather are influential journalists who are able to speak on the matters they care deeply about.

I have also shown how the women in Tabloid, due to the feminization of spaces within media, feel that because they already have a set space within the newsroom where they can show their true emotions and beliefs, they observe the ongoing structures around them and how to work around these. Returning to the words of Lamb (2000), “submission and silence (…) do not necessarily indicate an unequivocal, fully internalized compliance or modesty”. (2000, p. 194). Women in Tabloid observe and comply to these structures just enough to avoid criticism, and thereby also gain their public voices.

Because the main aim of many women in Tabloid is to write about important matters – after all, they are journalists – they have taught themselves how to manage their bodies to fit into a newsroom setting. When lowering their voices when being stared at by the men around them, they create an image that they are respectful and proper women. Using this image, the women get their articles published. They in other words enacted the behavior men around them saw fitting. The newsroom in general is a space of loud and posturing men trying to control things, but women, understanding how the system works, have adapted to certain parts of this system, but also challenging it. By carving out their own spaces within this larger space, the women in Tabloid have created a feminization of space within the newsroom, one which ultimately gives them a public voice. In chapter four, I will turn to the division between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news and what the two news divisions have to say for the women in Tabloid.
Chapter Four: How Women Work in a Man’s World

“There is strength in being soft”
- Veer Dhiman, Indian poet

It was Namasthe Telangana’s ten-year anniversary and the number of male journalists striking. The Telugu daily and sister publication of Telangana Today (TT) had gathered all their employees up on the terrace and we – the reporters in TT – had been invited up to join the ceremony. The reporters from Namasthe Telangana were seated in front of a small podium, and in the middle of the five men in the editorial board, there was a huge, white cake – like a wedding cake – looking like it could fall apart any second from the blazing hot temperature. All the male faces glanced up at Shrinivas, the main editor of Telangana Today, and clapped enthusiastically after he presented figures of the rising sales while looking out on the large group of middle-aged men. I was astonished. Not a single woman was present. Printed media often have more male journalists than female, compared to broadcasting, and local newspapers tend to have fewer females (Joseph, 2005), but here there were none. As I wondered whether it was only I who was contemplating the male-female ratio, Gaura looked over at me and said: “It’s insane. I can’t even see one girl. Not even one!” She laughed, looking rather misplaced, leaning towards the fence and wiping of pearls of sweat as the bustling afternoon heat swirled around us, saying how happy she was for working in Telangana Today and not in a local Telugu newspaper. At least we managed to get some of the cake.

Although more and more women are visible in the Indian media, their representation is far from equal compared to male reporters. Amu Joseph (2005) believes women in media tend to face an uphill task: “their voices are not always heard, they are nearly always kept out of decision making, they frequently face overt and subtle discrimination and thus find themselves consistently disadvantaged from the workplace” (2005, p. ix). Though, as we have seen in chapter three, women do find ways to make their voices heard, even if they sometimes achieve this in other ways than men. The majority of women in the press however struggle to win respect and
recognition as proficient professionals and in many ways have to fight their ways into media in a different way than men do. This depends on where women want to work – the desk and the ‘softer’ parts of news are seen as more appropriate for women, whereas the ‘hard’ news are assumed to be exclusively male spheres (Joseph, 2005). Because women are seen as ‘soft’ and thus more capable of handling human-interest stories, female journalists are directed towards ‘the women’s section’ of the newspaper. Despite reflecting a broad range of women’s concerns and interests, it is often considered ‘inferior’ to the main paper – creating a ‘hierarchical division’ between soft and hard news. The ‘softer’ parts of the news in which women usually report from is seen as trivial and insignificant, again making it harder for female reporters to be recognized as journalists on the same level as male peers.

This makes it not only difficult for women wanting to take up such news, but also for men wanting to write more feature-styled stories. There are newspapers in India that are less gender discriminatory – where men and female reporters can choose more freely, and where women have become prominent reporters in fields normally seen more fitting for men. The difference is, as we shall see, that whereas typical ‘male’ attributes, like being able to move around in public spaces, are appreciated also in spaces labeled as ‘female’, women who want to take up certain parts of issues within the newsroom labeled as ‘male’, are not valued for the ‘feminine’ characteristics they may bring to the newsroom. Then again, whereas men often limit themselves in the masculine territories, women have a much larger canvas within those areas labeled feminine, where they can explore all sorts of subjects as long as they are written in with a ‘soft’ way – more subscriptive and narrative than ‘hard’ factual news usually are.

I argue that women in Tabloid, despite being part of a traditional newsroom where the ‘male spheres’ are set, are able to challenge the soft and hard structures within the newsroom. The safe space around them allows women in Tabloid to write stories that are not always fitting the ‘softer’ feature-stories. They know that in Tabloid, they are safe; Shanti always fights to push their articles, even if they are sometimes seen as ‘too serious’. Again I shall return to the female reporters’ identity within the newspaper, and how they have to constantly fight to create a space that allows them to develop the articles they want. What women are allowed to do is not only affected by
the soft/hard news categories *per se*, but reflect broader stereotypes within society relating to women’s movement in public spaces and what areas women are believed to ‘know something about’, and not. These stereotypes vary extensively, though even in modern cities like Hyderabad, women do not have unrestricted access to certain public spaces. As we shall see, ‘male’ spaces affect women’s movement both *inside* and *outside* the newsroom. Hence, this chapter again returns to agency, but further outlines the Indian media context and how women’s agency is affected by the soft/hard news categories. I will also explore how the categories not only affect women, but also men, and the gender disparities that are created in a newsroom where modern and traditional stereotypes meet. The gender discriminatory issues women face do however not only depend on the newsroom culture, but also reflect broader stereotypes found within Indian society.

**The Current Situation**

There are not many figures available to estimate the number of female journalists in India today, and one of the few countrywide statistics available in academic research are those presented in Margaret Gallagher’s report, which covers the period between 1990-95. According to the report, women held only 8 per cent of the jobs in the Indian press these years (Gallagher, cited in Joseph 2005, p. 8). While their presence in broadcasting was slightly better, at 12 per cent, the numbers are still relatively low considering the fact that women made up 25 per cent of the total labour force in the country those years. In a more recent report, findings from a study launched by UNESCO, UN Women and the International Federation of Journalists in 2015, show that India has “a strong media landscape full of women journalists” (UN Women, 2015, p. 11). Women across Asia and the Pacific make up 28.6 percent of the media workforce, but there are no clear numbers about India specifically. The survey, based on 100 responses from each of the seven Asian focus countries, found how women journalists in the sample were better educated and having higher professional qualities compared to their male colleagues. Yet they continue to be restricted to stereotypical beats (in other words, ‘softer news’), and face “more job insecurity, lower wages and gender discrimination” (UN Women, 2015 p. 43).
While the advantage of class, caste and higher education has seen some women climb to the top positions in the profession, the majority of women “still find themselves in the middle and lower rungs within the office” (UN Women, 2015, p. 11). In a survey covering ten countries, over half of the journalists who responded – both male and female – agreed on the fact that “women are directed towards ‘soft’ topics (human interest, social affairs, culture) rather than ‘hard’ areas like business, economics or foreign news” (Joseph, 2005, p. 35).

Despite the relevance of the two news categories, especially in terms of newsroom culture, many authors observe there is no consensus about how soft and hard news ought to be defined (Reinermann et al, 2012). The length and structure of the two may vary enormously; whereas hard news articles are often short and concise, soft news stories tend to be written in a longer, more feature-styled way. Patterson (2000) refers to hard news as “coverage of breaking events involving top leaders, major issues, or significant disruptions in the routines of daily life, such as an earthquake or airline disaster (…) Soft news (…) has been described (…) as news that is more personality-centered, less time-bound, more practical and more incident-based than other news (2000, p. 3-4). While this definition is quite multi-dimensional, it seems to forget that it is not only the topic that makes news ‘hard’ or ‘soft’; the framing of an event or topic that links it to society at large, or to public good, can be done in either news categories. It seems questionable that ‘hard’ topics necessarily contain such relevance and ‘soft’ topics not. Curran et al. (2010) defines hard news as “reports about politics, public administration, the economy, science, technology”, and soft news as “reports about celebrities, human interest, sport and other entertainment-centered stories” (Curran et al, cited in Reinemann et al, 2012, p. 224). This definition fits the categories in which the reporters in Telangana Today used, though it does not say anything about the societal purpose the news may actually serve.

It is equally critical to address the societal meaning of soft/hard news. Franklin (1997, p. 8) argues that the purpose of tabloid journalism is “less to inform than to elicit

---

4 Believed to have a better grip on trends, health and familial issues, all the women who applied for work in Telangana Today were directed to Sunday Scape, Tabloid or the two editing desks, something I will explore in succeeding paragraphs.
sympathy”. This argument looks at Tabloid or feature news as something sensational, something that plays with the reader’s emotions – news that in other words do not advocate informative news. When looking at tabloid news in such a way, emotions are somewhat devalued, as if “the sensational is perceived to involve emotion in such a way as to preclude rationality and hence serious quality journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013, p. 131). Others argue that it these emotions are what can be used to make objective journalism good – that storytelling and objective approaches need not be isolated from one another. Some researchers even believe journalists face a ‘paradox’ when choosing between the two; “the more objective they are, the more unreadable they become; while the better storytellers they are, the more readers will respond (…)” (Bird & Dardenne, 1988, p. 78).

It is important to point out to the fact that many women (and men) both want and prefer to write news seen as ‘soft’. Many women in Tabloid and Sunday Scape admitted they appreciated subjects labeled ‘trivial’. When writing longer and more personal pieces, there was also room for a more artistic and descriptive way or writing; women in Tabloid felt they could incarnate what they were interested in in a different way than they might have in ‘harder’ news. Also, seeing how emotions can unravel the stories that are told in a more captivating way (though this of course depend on the reader), some of the women in Tabloid believed that writing ‘soft’ news was much more enjoyable than writing straightforward, ‘plain’ news. Bhawna, for example, was in charge of the movie section. She went out and interviewed a lot of Bollywood actors, and loved her job. Many of the female journalists I worked with were also interested in travel, education, health and food – something they could explore in these columns.

In one direction, women are discriminated against when wanting to take up news not seen fitting for them, and in the other, men are also discriminated against when wanting to write about issues gendered more ‘feminine’. While these tensions might be felt by both journalists, they are different – not only in terms of how each specific gender experience these tensions, but also, while in some newspapers the differences between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ are more blurred, other newspapers uphold them. In these newspapers it may be equally hard for journalists wanting to take up news that are at odds with ‘male’ and ‘female’ stereotypical beats – for example, Parvathi Menon, an
Indian female journalist, points out that while some women may be devalued within the profession, women who have entered “the previously masculine territories of politics and business, few men have been able to make an entry into the equally important areas of journalistic concern which have traditionally been seen as female terrain” (Joseph, 2005, p. 151).

Sharjeel, whose career I will further explore later on, is a great example of this. He preferred writing about ‘softer’ news, like art and culture, but when the Bureau needed more reporters and he was already on the inside, he was an easy choice. Even though he was promised to still be able to write about his personal interests, he felt like such stories were often given less importance in the main issue than they would have been given in Tabloid.

Illustrated in the narrative of the women in Tabloid, one may also argue that ‘femininity’ and what is considered as such, affects women more. Not only are they often restricted to the ‘softer’ beats, but they also have to behave in a way that complies with female behavior. As we have seen in chapter 3, women in Tabloid had to act in a specific way in order to adjust to the Indian body politics placed on women. Luckily, they however had a free zone, a space in which they could relax, be ‘themselves’ (though this self is obviously constituted and acted out in different ways, as we also have seen in terms of voice). The significant difference between men and women is nevertheless that whereas men can, when wanting to join ‘female’ terrain news, still be ‘manly men’. The men that joined Tabloid were even valued for their maleness because they could go out on late events. Women who join ‘hard’, ‘male’ news, on the other hand, are rarely valued for the ‘female’ characteristics they may bring to ‘hard’ news; they are not seen suitable for late-night events, and are not wanted to write about ‘hard’, political issues because their questions are too blunt.

Thus, “the current definitions of femininity and the historically specific requirements of journalism produce tensions which – while expressed in different forms – are felt by female journalists”, more I argue, than men are. (Zoonen, cited in Carter et al, 1998, p. 37). Then again, these tensions might not be experienced in the same way by the female reporters in Tabloid as the women in ‘hard’ newsrooms do, something I will later turn to and explain more thoroughly.
**Soft women, hard men**

In Telangana Today news seen as ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ were often distinguished, not only in terms of what kind of news they centered around, but also the importance the editors gave them. The reporters in the Bureau tackled the ‘hard’, major issues within society – writing about the current political situation and matters happening within the Telangana state. Most of the articles were based on reporting that the different journalists carried out; during the day, the male reporters were out doing what reporters do – reporting – and when returning to the office, they wrote up their articles before sending them to the desk. They sometimes went out later at night, too, and then wrote articles based on what they had seen the following day. Before sending it to the desk, they never edited or improved the final writing themselves – that was the desk’s job. The ‘hard’ news were seen as the newspapers main driving force – as can be understood as it was referred to as ‘the main issue’, but also in terms of what level of coverage and the actual length of the newspaper.

Tabloid, on the other hand, was a shorter and thinner newspaper, often seen as a supplement to the main issue. Again, seeing how Tabloid is referred to as a ‘supplement’ is saying something about the lower rank it reportedly had. The ‘soft’ tabloid news was supposed to be seen as ‘easy’ and ‘light’, news that someone could pick up and enjoy, not just read. News seen as ‘too heavy’ were often dismissed as they would most likely not apply to the readers wishes to read something easy, something they didn’t need to worry about. The Tabloid covered health, fashion, relationships, IT, entertainment, food and travel, to name some. The more visual style was meant to appeal to women and youngsters; “men naturally think in abstract concepts, women think in pictures” (Holland, 2004, p. 20), and thus had more pictures and color in its pages than the main sheet had. The ‘crisp’, subtle language used in Tab was meant to appeal to the strata of women reading these newspapers – using bigger pictures, larger fonts and a more visual style. As Shrinivas Reddy, the main editor, said when I interviewed him on the 5th of May, 2018:
Most of the team in Tab who I recruited have raw hands, they came straight out of the classroom to the newsroom, and they turned out to be phenomenal, creative workers. If you ask me to write for Tab, I may not be able, because my experience is more towards serious reporting. I may not be able to write a movie review or a fashion review. These girls can do a much better job than me, but I can’t ask them to write a serious topic about left wing extremism or a political scenario – which I handle, which I write – they will not be able to do that. You need to have that “youthful spirit” which is there in the Tab.

Shrinivas argues that because women are more ‘creative’, they can easily write stories that are descriptive. In the late nineteenth century, as newspapers started to focus on reaching a much wider readership than they had before, some editors believed that if using a more visual style, those who had little time or were less inclined to plough through heavy news, more people would start to enjoy the newspaper. This ‘new journalism’ moved away from writing sophisticated words, towards an easier, more accessible use of words. Many newspapers shifted to a more visual style, as it was thought, “the less educated readers in the wider market would respond to a ‘direct appeal of the eye’” (Holland, 1998, p. 20). Though it was never directly said the editors believed those reading the Tab were less educated, it was however suggested that the young, often female, readers did not care too much about the news in the main sheet, and thus preferred a more visual style.

While creating more jobs for women, the ‘gendering of news’ is somehow problematic: when assuming ‘all women’ care about certain things, the articles that are written by men, for men, seldom take on a female perspective. Ross (2010) believes that when “most journalists are men and most politicians, business leaders, and senior executives are men, then a male-ordered circuit of the same old, same old is repeated endlessly in this buddy-buddy world” (2010, p. 110). That way, because such few sources are female, the public does not only produce an image of the man as ‘the expert’, but also that men have a natural space in the public sphere whereas women don’t – which again contributes to the image of seeing public space as something male and thus the possible marginalization of women’s movement and voices.
During the months I worked in Telangana Today, I often heard how male journalists believed it would be ‘too tough’ for women to deal with hard news, especially crime reporting as many of the stories was about violence targeting women. Again there was a sense that the women needed to be ‘protected’ from the outside world, and that the male journalists had in some way ‘helped them’ by not letting them work on these beats. This does not only invoke the myth about women not being able to handle such beats, but also strengthens the norms found within the newsroom. Why, we may ask, did they not look at this the other way around? By letting women access and report on crime stories relating to women, they had the chance to speak from a women’s perspective, while also dealing with the victims in what might be seen as a more emotional manner – better storytelling is, as we have seen, a way of catching the readers attention.

Studies suggest that when the newsroom is balanced in terms of men and women, the content and composition of the news are being influenced. Because women have a different experience of being part of society, they thus bring on a different perspective (Steiner, 1998). Especially, when in some Indian families, women are seen as having a more natural space within the house, writing news from and towards a female perspective may help fight the “conformist outlook which produces hegemonic journalistic output in terms of ‘routinizing’ a male-ordered perspective” (Ross, 2019, p. 112). Having more women feature in ‘hard’ news might also make it natural for female readers to indulge in such news.

By placing ‘hard’ news on top of the hierarchical ladder, something that ‘hard, manly-men’ are supposed to do, those men who are more interested in and want to take up ‘softer’ news, are however often discoursed, because they are not seen fitting in such a space. The ‘gendering’ of the soft/hard news categories do in other words not only affect women, but also men. When Sharjeel started working in Telangana Today, he wanted to work for the Tabloid section, as this was the section that wrote most about art and culture, the two things he deeply cared about. However, after a while, he was shifted to the Bureau. In one way, this might have been because he developed a relationship with one of the women in Tabloid, Jaya, but I later learned that this was not the only reason; he was male, and when the Bureau needed more reporters, he was thus an easy choice. Despite being promised to still be able to write about culture and
art, he later confided in me saying how he now felt like the only times they allowed him to write anything about Hyderabad’s art or culture-scene, it had something to do with TRS. Thus, he was forced to take on Telangana Today’s political views, rather than writing about the things he truly cared about.

The ‘serious’ topics, Shrinivas says, are not suited for women. The women will *not be able to do that*. Why did Shrinivas not see women as able? One reason might have been that the women working in Tabloid were used to work with a certain style when producing news, and he simply did not think they would cope with the harder, more factual news. I however believe there is a deeper, more complex reason to this. First of all, in journalism, “the idea of objectivity as a central feature of journalistic (…) practice enjoys a long and distinguished (…) history in the field” (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013, p. 131). Because there is a certain sense (at least in an Indian context) that men are better to handle this objectivity – to detach themselves from what they are writing about – it is believed that men thus are better at dealing with the ‘hard’ news. Typical for female journalists, on the other hand, is that they are seen as taking “greater care for audience needs and desires and a less detached and rational way of reporting” (Zoonen cited in Carter et al, 1998, p. 41). The emotional aspect that women bring to journalism is seen best suited when dealing with ‘human-interest’ stories, not crime and politics.

There is however something deeply controversial about linking certain attributes to the female psyche. Sherry Ortner (1974), in her essay on female and male status within society, points to the fact that if we empirically grant that women have a different psychic structure than men, and “postulate emotionality or irrationality” as universal aspects of feminine psyche, “we are confronted with those traditions in various parts of the world in which women functionally are, and are seen as, more practical, pragmatic, and this-worldly than men” (Ortner, p. 81). Ortner however believes that one dimension we *can* say about the feminine personality, is that it “tends to be involved with concrete feelings, things, and people, rather than abstract entities (Ortner, 1974). Whereas men often represent something of relative objectivity, like “experiences of self, others (…) in time in (…) objective and distant ways, (…) females represent experiences in (…) interpersonal, subjective (…) ways” (Carlson, 1971, cited in Ortner, p. 81).
Ortner explains how this is linked to “universal features of family structure” (Ortner, 1974, p. 81), and that women – being more responsible for childcare and chores centred to the home – are aligned with nature, not culture. The men, on the other hand, lack the “natural basis” of nursing, and their sphere of activity is then directed towards “religion, ritual, politics, and other realms of cultural thought (...) in which (...) social synthesis are made” (Ortner, 1974, page 79. This is obviously too simple, and it goes without saying that women cannot fully be consigned to nature as some women choose completely different paths than that of the family – some women obviously choose not to have children or have grown up in families with other familial structures than the ‘traditional ones’. One may also argue that the women that do bear children are primary agents of children’s early socialization, and thus, she is also a “representative of culture” (Ortner, 1974, p. 80).

In Tabloid, one of the female reporters, Bhawna, would usually take her son to work if he was sick or if her in-laws were unable to watch him. When I asked her if her husband not could take him, she said he had ‘things to do’ and that she would rather prefer him to be with his in-laws. Thus, Bhawna was in many ways the primary caretaker of her son, and even though she had to go to work, she ended up as the primary caretaker. This happened several times, and when I asked Shanti about this, she explained to me how she remembered having small children when she was a young journalist, but working under a ‘mean female boss’ who did not grant her leave or understand her situation, made her work late. Now, she said, being the boss of other women having young children, it was easier to understand why Bhawna, or others, being mothers, had to take their personal lives into account, too. In light of that, Ortner’s argument does have a valid point in the sense that much of the Indian society – and the gendered politics therein – indeed are based on women seen as caretakers or homemakers, which of course affects their working positions.

The great thing about the Tabloid, then, was that the women knew that they had a boss that understood their situation, and instead of having to hide or in some way downplay their responsibilities at home, Shanti understood and catered to their needs. Again, the safe space in Tabloid posed as something inherently important and gave women the chance to combine work and family life, or – nature and culture.
When explaining why women tend to end up in ‘softer’ news, looking at the actual content of the news reports might be as important as mapping the involvement of women in news industries. Ross (2010) argues that “one of the most frequent frames of women in news discourse is as victim” (p. 95). The media’s fascination with the ‘fragile female form’ and her vulnerability “says something very powerful about women’s agency and women’s role in society” (Ross, 2010, p. 95). Reporting of sex crimes in India happen on a day-to-day basis, both suggesting something about how often these crimes happen, but also about women who are seen as victims, someone who needs protecting. Of course, women are the victims in these situations, but most of them are in fact survivors who are not described as such. Vishnu narrated how there was recently a Telugu actress who was raped, and then protested half-naked in the streets of Hyderabad. The male journalists in the Bureau had then made comments that she was “crying for media-attention” and that they did not understand why ‘these women’ were given coverage. Instead of addressing the issue, the rape, they were annoyed by her protest. Phadke et al (2011, p. 55) write that “in an utopian world, one might ask that reports interrogate the kinds of moral positions that underlie the desire for a particular brand of safety for women, which reduces rather than expands women’s access to public space”, instead of media coverage favoring violent incidents against women alone.

Comments like “she was crying for media attention” are not only tough for women to hear, but might also contribute to the overall ‘maleness’ of the newsroom, where the ‘hard, unemotional men’ deal with such news. Not only does this affect the overall newsroom behavior, but also the articles and the angles they take on. In a particularly memorable situation, I remember how Shantoosh and Indrajeet were told to publish a video of a women being raped. They were instructed to blur her face, but nevertheless to publish the very graphic video. Of course, in journalism, “there are profound reasons for the institutionalized resistance to the idea of emotion, relating to the distinctive social role and status of journalism” (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013: 131), but equally important is the ethical side, where journalists are constantly faced with issues.
where they need to decide where to draw the line. Shrinivas believed this was something people should see, as it said something about Hyderabad and the police force not doing what they should (again returning to what I mentioned in chapter 2 about sometimes posting articles to show how Telangana Today was not ‘completely bought’). But Shantoosh and Indrajeet rejected this argument, believing the video was way too graphic. They refused to publish it. Being part of the web-desk where only young journalists worked, they often decided what stories to publish from both the Bureau and Tabloid, but here they show that despite having agreed to publish the ‘most important news’ found in each editorial team, they would not let their personal beliefs overrule Shrinivas’ wishes – signalizing there are not only ‘hard, unemotional’ men present in the newsroom, and the ways in which the typical male attributes might be cross-cut by other demographics such as age.

The other male journalists, especially the older, did not seem to pay as close attention to the emotional and ethical implications of news as Shantoosh and Indrajeet did. Many of those working in the Bureau were either directly hired by Shrinivas, or had chosen to follow him from his previous workplace, The Hindu. In fact, it seemed as if many of those working in the Bureau clearly looked up to him. As he was the one who got directly orders from the top leaders on what cases to focus on and not, it often seemed as if it was Shrinivas – rather than the journalists themselves – that was the ethical compass that decided what to publish and not. Even though the younger journalists challenged Shrinivas and went against him, they were not a part of the Bureau, and did supposedly not have the same pressure as they did. When asking Balu, one of the reporters in the Bureau about the potential repercussions if anyone did post anything negative about the TRS, he said:

*One thing is, it wouldn’t get published. There are levels of checks and balances. If it escapes everything and then gets published... I suppose you would loose your job. Because the management would want the message to be very, very clear.*

- Balu
Balu further explained that if Telangana Today pointed out ‘systemic problems’, they were fine, but they could never “pen it on an individual”.

Similarly to the journalists in the web-desk, the women in Tabloid did not have the same pressure as Balu and the others in the Bureau had. When being part of a safe space, the women in Tabloid could guide themselves outside the pressure many of the reporters in the Bureau did – they were not directly hired or followers of Shrinivas, but rather seen part of a news division ‘less important’, which again gave them more freedom in terms of what limits and ethical implications they chose caring about and not.

The reason to this lies within the fact that Telangana Today indeed was a political newspaper, which is fundamental when explaining the gendered elements within the newsroom and the hierarchy therein.

**The Political Echo**

Because much of the ‘hard news’ in Telangana Today centered on politics, and specifically, the developments of the TRS party, tackling political reporting was thus seen particularly important. The same afternoon I had dosa\(^5\) and chai\(^6\) and chatted with Vishnu, she explained how a lot of women never get the chance to talk about politics because they are not exposed to it. Expected to cater to their husband and their family’s need (again returning to what I described in chapter three), women are not seen as capable of such news. Because many of the male reporters had wives they were not used to include in political affairs, they did not expect other, and also younger women, to manage the task. Traditionally politics in India is equally to hard news seen as something ‘serious’, something women are not supposed to know anything about:

\(^5\) Indian rice pancake.

\(^6\) Tea.
It depends on your education, and how you understand the world. Not many women are into politics, and if they don’t get the exposure, they don’t get the chance to talk about it. Usually people say; women are not supposed to talk about politics. Women, in urban cities and all, are more independent and work, but in most of the rural places, it depends on your husbands political views or... What party they [their husband] belong to becomes their wives party. Either it is imposed on them, or... Women don’t have a voice for themselves, they are supposed to ‘do like this’ or told to ‘do like this’, basically the newspaper can cater to men, and in that affect, it will affect the women also.

- Vishnu

Spending months with my female informants however painted a very different picture of women and politics. Angang’s uncle was a prominent politician in Nagaland, and she often spoke of the happenings there. Similarly, Kee closely followed the political situation in kerala, where she came from, and hoped to take up political reporting when moving back to Kerala in the future. Nikita widely discussed women’s issues and was updated on all the major happenings within the world, and as I spent many nights discussing political issues or other important events, women clearly can be – and are – interested in politics. Of course, these are observations based on a very small number of people, and cannot say anything about what the whole Indian female population are like. Yet, as I befriended several women throughout the city, both from lower, middle and upper classes, I understood many of them to be both updated and interested in the area.

Though in the larger cities, most of these attitudes have changed, they however follow women wanting to take up political journalism. Apparently, there is still a problem sending women out to interview politicians. Sharjeel, who worked in the Bureau, said many reporters did not find any issues with female reporters per se, but that women may struggle to develop the kind of easy, informal relationship with politicians as men do. In the world of Indian politics, most politicians are male, and eating, drinking and sharing confidences is not seen suitable for women. Especially younger women that are unmarried might be put in an awkward position trying to befriend male
contacts; being too friendly can make someone get the wrong impression of you. Because women in journalism are often seen ‘blunt’ and outgoing in the first place, some men simply believe that female reporters are an easy catch. Even if women do not necessarily have to use these techniques in order to obtain information, these are the strategies that male peers often use, thus making it harder for women to gain the trust of informants without developing a friendly relationship or hanging out with them.

This brings us to an important dimension when writing about the definitions of soft and hard news in Telangana Today. As I described in the first chapter, and have returned to continuously, the ownership of the newspaper was connected to the political party TRS. Much of the news written in the Bureau were based on political developments and other political happenings within the city. Of course, and to a very large degree, newspapers worldwide tend to focus on a certain political stance. The Guardian, for example, has readership that tends to be split between Democrats and Labour. Some newspapers are family-owned, some are corporate owned or others are advertising-driven. Few newspapers are however directly connected to main political leaders of the party they support; some argue these are paid news that “seldom allows editors the freedom they need” (The Wire, 2019). In an article found on the Wire (a public online portal trying to oppose itself from the traditional models of the media), the Chief Minister of TRS is described heavily associated with both Namasthe Telangana and Telangana Today. In one article, the headline states: “When the Chief Minister is also a media owner” (Shaw, 2018). Reading the article made me somewhat surprised as some of the journalists in Telangana Today – especially Shrinivas himself – heavily disagreed when I asked if they were owned by TRS. Even if it was something a lot of people knew, it was rarely spoken loudly about – hence my surprise this was also known publicly. Not only was Telangana Today connected to TRS in vast terms, but the Chief Minister in fact owned it.

This was something that of course affected not only the journalists within Telangana Today, but also the direction and stance each article had; articles in the main sheet were often instruments of political communication sought out to reproduce TRS’ vision and help disseminate the political ideals of the leaders. The reason why many
of the articles were seen ‘hard’ was because they distinctively focused on political and governmental issues in a clear-cut way.

As much of the ‘hard news’ in Telangana Today centered on politics, and specifically, the developments of the TRS party, tackling political reporting was thus seen particularly important. I remember one afternoon as I was sitting up on the roof having dosa and chai when Vishnu joined me. The same day I had interviewed Shrinivas, and Vishnu and I talked about politics in India and how a lot of women never get the chance to talk about politics because they are not exposed. She described how “obviously, TT is pro KCR. The underlying goal is, as I have understood, to raise positive focus on KCR and to gather voters for the upcoming election”. Because many of the male reporters had wives they were not used to include in political affairs, they did not expect other, and especially younger women, to manage the task. The ‘soft’, ‘emotional’ women were seen suitable elsewhere:

Since we work in Tabloid, we focus mostly on lighthearted, positive, entertaining stories. Sometimes there are certain topics you really want to write about, but then it’s a little too serious for Tabloid. At the university I went to there was a student who committed suicide because the administration was too harsh. Then student unions came together, and they protested, and it was linked to the central government and it was a huge protest in India. At the end of 2016, I wrote an article covering all these issues. I wanted to write the story, I really liked it: some things you really put your heart in when you write about, but once we went live the story couldn’t go because it was a little too serious for Tabloid. We [journalists] try not to take sides, we try to take a stand, but we try to substantiate it with enough material, but the newspapers doesn’t want you to take a stand, and because of all of these issues coming together we couldn’t push the story.

- Keertana

Returning to the political side of the newspaper, and how TRS was directly connected to the ownership of Telangana Today, many of the articles in Telangana Today did in
fact take a certain stand – putting across a political message. Kee says that journalists are not supposed to take sides, though, implicitly, this is exactly what the reporters in Tabloid did when writing articles pro-KCR and TRS. Thus, when explaining why Kee’s story was dismissed, we cannot only look at the ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ news categories, but also at the very nature of the news. Because the protests might not have catered to the political situation that the ownership wanted to focus on, and in addition, was ‘too serious’, the article got turned down. The ownership did in other words not only affect the men in the Bureau, but also women in a Tabloid, though in a far more complex way. At first glance, because the news Tabloid were often brushed off as ‘unimportant’ by the journalists working in other divisions, they rarely put much energy into what the women could and could not write about.

The front page and the ‘main’ Tabloid stories were however seen as important, and thus had to go through both Shanti, Lalith and also sometimes Shrinivas. Though the political aspect of Tabloid may sometimes have led to rejections by the (male) editors, it also opened up a new way of including ‘harder’, more serious news: the women in Tabloid knew that if their articles had a certain take, they would more easily be accepted. Manvi, for example, wrote an article about the new cab initiative for women: female drivers for female passengers. Though initially this story may have been seen as ‘too heavy’, she knew that the service was initiated by the TRS government, and thus would easier please the editors and what they wanted to write about. Usha Raman, female journalist and professor in media studies at the University of Hyderabad, explained how:

“Politics in India have not really thought about the gender question beyond framing it as the women’s question. So when you talk about the women vote, its conceptualized in terms of welfare schemes, or family issues... When they think about the female vote gang, they are thinking in terms of working-class women, where its not so much about empowerment in the kind of way an urban woman would think about it, but in terms of livelihood and security. Those are not the kind of women that are being reached by Telangana Today. Its an English newspaper, so who reads it? Mostly people in the city. I don’t even know that Telangana Today... I think their audience is not so much the voters as those who russle up votes, and policy makers”.
Checking up these facts showed that most of the distribution of the newspaper did in fact circle around governmental houses, politicians or other policy makers. The main purpose was not to gather votes, but rather to frame all the positive developments and – to put it bluntly – make those connected to TRS happy. Writing these kinds of news did in other words not need to take in a female perspective, as they were not meant to gather female votes; women were either seen as someone not caring about politics (like Vishnu described) or simply preferred reading other news stories. Women that however did read Telangana Today, believed to be reading only the Tabloid section.

Margaret Gallagher maintains that “stereotyped beliefs and attitudes about the qualities required for certain jobs and about how work should be handled often hinder women’s progress in the media” (Gallagher cited in Joseph, 2005, p. 35). Not only do stereotypical beliefs within media hinder women, but the broader gender dynamics in Indian culture do, too. Of course there are huge variations depending on region, class and caste—although the fact that most of those that work in Telangana Today are working in an English newspaper already says something about the reporters coming from a certain background; speaking English at work reflects the fact that most of the reporters overwhelmingly belong to a higher social and economic class than those only speaking local languages. Local language publications, like Namasthe Telangana, tend to aquire “journalistic personnel from the rural or semi-urban middle class” (Joseph, 2005, p. 271), whereas urban youngsters or those who go to University are seldom fluent enough to work in their mother tongues, and thus end up in bigger, English-medium newspapers. Joseph (2005) writes that “female journalists in sections of the Indian language press face more problems than their counterparts in the English language press” (p. 271) based on the fact that traditional press tend to succumb to traditional patriarchal beliefs within society, and thus take in fewer female reporters (as we saw in the introduction of this chapter).

In Telangana Today, women thus had a better starting point than those entering more traditional publishing houses with fewer women. Angang explained that even though journalists are expected to be ‘a little ahead of society’, the traditions in media were followed in Telangana, too, and that women were expected to write about traditional women beats. Yet, the women in Tabloid had something the other women in
Telangana Today did not have: a safe space. Even though they were normally seen as more creative and thus better at writing feature-stories, the women knew that with stories that had a certain political angle – writing something positive about a new female cab-initiative, for example – would be easier to publish than writing about ‘serious’ news not seen as political or positive developments for the Telangana region. That way, they knew that if the articles they wrote had a certain angle, they might still be able to publish it. For example, as Manvi wrote about female taxi drivers, she knew it was initiated by TRS and would thus be more easily accepted. In such a way, not only did women in Tabloid write ‘soft’ news, they also wrote about political news even if framing them in a more descriptive way, also channeling the female readership and all those women that of course are interested and care about politics, too.

Another way of making sure their articles got published was to hand in the draft right before the deadline. As the women in Tabloid knew that Lalith and Shrinivas were preoccupied with thinking about the news that the main issue wrote about (especially in the months before the upcoming election), the reporters in Tabloid was cunningly aware of the fact that if they handed in something later than they were supposed to, ‘hard’ or ‘serious’ articles would easier be accepted as the editors did not have time (or energy) to come up with something else.

Are we Ever Safe?

When speaking about women and journalism in India, a word that is being constantly used, is safety. In order for women to speak their minds, a safe space helps them. Working late and going out on late-night events is unsafe. Why do women have to feel safe? Why is safety such an important concept for female journalists? Focusing on safe-spaces and safety implies that the journalistic field (or Indian society as a whole) is unsafe. And yes, to some extent, being a female in India is connected to fear. India is one of the countries with the highest rate of violence directed towards women, and in 2018, India was named as the most dangerous country for women in a survey based on experts in women’s issues UN (Thomson-Reuters, 2018).
Vishnu was one of the few who had used the cab-service for a little while, but when the driver had tried to unbutton his shirt and said something out of line as he was driving the last woman home, she stopped using it. “It didn’t feel safe”, she told me. In other words, not even a private hired office cab made the women feel hundred percent safe, and portrays an inherently down-side for working women in India: the need to always plan ahead and be dependant on others. It is of course difficult, not to mention unfair, to conclude that all women in media encounter these issues – in the bigger newspapers, the journalists tend to be paid more, and thus, they also have money to pay their own transport, which again gives them freedom to leave work whenever they are finished. Others, like Vishnu, who worked in a smaller newspaper, had family who supported her, and helped her buying a bike, giving her the same freedom as a journalist in a bigger newspaper with a higher salary would have. Men, on the other hand, are able to head out of the office whenever they like and do not need to plan their day the same way. As a result, women take precautions. No matter how big or small, they were taken, and even though there was minimal chances something happened to us when travelling in a cab, there was always the could or might. On the other hand, Hyderabad is one of the few states with their own police department launched only to enhance safety for women, She Teams, and cab services and public transport are far better than in other big Indian cities, making it possible for women to be out at night in a different way than they may have in other cities. The need to have a She Team in itself however portray how the city is not entirely safe for women (as few cities are), and the necessity of such a safety commodity.

Because women are seen as ‘soft’, they are also someone who needs protecting from the hard, outer world. Asking Shrinivas why more women did not work in the Bureau, he answered:

*One problem is that men have some advantages. Not at the creative level, but in the physical world. For example, I have a late night assignment. I have to consider several aspects when I ask a reporter to go out and cover something, I can’t ask a girl to go cover something at ten o’clock in the night. Though I might not take directly responsibility for all the things, but at least when*
someone is on duty I must take care of their security, safety... In such ways, [having] a male reporter would help.

Returning to space in the 2nd chapter, and how women within Tabloid have carved out a safe space within the newsroom, the outside world is not seen as such. Public spaces – especially at night – are something dangerous, and women need to be protected from them. Phadke et al (2011) in their book Why Loiter?, argues that “every little girl is brought up to know she must walk a straight line between home and school, between home and office, from one sheltered space to another” (p. vii). During my months in Hyderabad, I was taught the same, and even from the women in Tabloid, who constantly sought to challenge these beliefs, also taught me how I should take care of myself, how to do gender.

One of the ways of doing gender was to never move around in public after 9 or 10pm. I vividly remember the first time I met Angang, Nikita and Kee at a restaurant downtown Hyderabad. The bar was noisy and I could barely hear what the others were saying. I am sure the same thing goes for them too. They all came straight from work and were visibly tired after a long day, and eventually Kee suggested we could go back to their apartment and have ice-cream there. Nikita said she was happy to take me on her moped, and as she was wrapping her scarf around the head, looking, to be quite frank, like she prepared herself for some kind of war, I was unsure whether this was actually a good idea. It didn’t feel safe. Less so because Nikki was a strange, more because the need to prep herself for a short scooter ride said something about the measures she needed to take when driving at night. We were about to enter a space not seen fitting for women, and how Nikita extensively prepared seemed like a marker of the low safety ’quotient’.

I remember Nikki and how she looked and me, laughing:

*I know I almost look like a terrorist. Haha! But it’s the only way to travel by night; a lot of women wrap scarfs around their head so that they can’t be spotted so easily. The best thing is to wrap your hair in so that it doesn’t show. It’s what you have to do here in India.*
Having travelled in remote parts of Indonesia on a scooter the year before, I knew what she was talking about. Wrapping your hair was one of the best ways of becoming less visible. In India the unpleasant truth is – whether one chooses to care about the safety issue or not – that the streets are more unsafe for women at night. Women are not expected to be out on the streets at night, and there is still the assumption that the ones that are, are available for night work. In fact, most women’s toilets close at 9pm, “sending a clear message that women are not expected to – and are not supposed to be – out in public at night” (Phadke et al, 2013, p. 42).

According to Naryan (2018), “a life lived in fear is an abbreviated life (...) Fear and the search for psychological safety – where women feel free to express themselves without fear of being laughed at, humiliated, demeaned, followed, threatened, punished, cut off, stalked, trolled or raped – shape the lives of many women” (Naryan, 2018, p. 7). Many of the young women I was hanging out with in Hyderabad was outgoing and spent a lot of time outside the house, but they rarely travelled in the dark alone, and they always took precautions in order not to end up in a bad situation. There was always the added stress to what if something would happen, something I too experienced taking cabs after dark. Hyderabad is generally considered to be more safe than Delhi and Mumbai, and even though there was minimal chances something happened to us when travelling in a cab, there was always the could or might. Something could happen. Something might happen. As a result, women take precautions. My informants never seemed to let the safety aspect directly affect them in the way that they would always go places they wanted to go, but unlike their male friends or colleagues, they often travelled together or teamed up with male friends. Their lives involved planning their days around how they would get from A to B in a safe way.

The first time I took a cab alone in India was the same night I met what would be my coming informants. Up until that point, I had been sharing a cab with Johanna, my classmate from Norway. Now, having agreed to meet up with Angang, I realized I needed to travel alone. I remember how I constantly looked at my phone, weighing up the positive sides of staying later with the girls and thus increasing my chances of them becoming my informants vs. my own safety returning home. Could I ask them to stay over... No, I thought, I have just met these people. What are the chances
something will actually happen...To me? Today? In retrospect it is quite funny to think about all the girls who sat there thinking the same thoughts. They had been wanting to ask me to spend the night, but afraid of being too pushy, they chose not to. Angang booked the cab and a young, small guy in his twenties appeared in a white car. We used the app service Ola, which lets you track the driver’s route, and sent the track details to Johanna and her boyfriend. Angang instructed the driver to take me home, and I got in the backseat. As I tried ignoring the driver looking at me in the mirror, we were off.

The first few minutes went fine – I kept a careful eye on the map and made sure he took the instructed route. The silence in the car did not in any way resemble all the noises inside of me: my heart was racing, and I had to focus on just breathing normally while trying to act as if everything was fine – or even more so – as if I was actually cool about this. Looking out on the dark, empty streets of Hyderabad, only men or construction workers wandered the streets. We had been driving for fifteen minutes when the driver suddenly started to slow down the car. Why was he stopping? He kept on staring at me intensely in the mirror, like he was contemplating what to do, and then turning his head, looking at me directly. It was pitch black outside and the only thing I saw was deserted trees. Had we run out of gas? My mind kept racing and I started thinking of possible escape routes. He was small, so maybe I’d actually be able to tackle him. Or, no! I’d try to outrun him! Trying to look at something else but his intense eyes, I clinged on to my phone, about to call Johanna when her boyfriend suddenly called. “He is driving off the normal route!”, Tanmay said, sounding clearly anxious. I asked him to give the phone to Johanna, who said: “Don’t show you are afraid, ok? He wants to see if you are getting scared. Pretend you are not scared. I tried to breathe, turning to the driver, “Why are you stopping?” trying to sound casually annoyed. “Drive!” He kept staring at me, and for two seconds he again seemed to weigh the different possibilities. Then he drove off.

In many ways, the fear that Narya spoke of, and the search of psychological safety became my reality too. Always thinking about how I’d be safe. Thus, when speaking of risk in India, and how women constantly need to measure the risk vs. pleasure, fun vs. danger, I can easily understand how it affects your life. In India, I too shaped my life around decisions based on when and where I would feel safest or not. I also
understand how family and friends do want to protect women, especially younger women, from harm.

Speaking of journalism, this is of course of great importance and affects women in many more ways than it does for men. First of all, accessing public spaces – especially at night – is seen more dangerous for women. It however adds a new dimension when looking at journalism because female journalists – especially those dealing with crime and hard news, not only need to defend their work in the traditional sense, but also when facing harassment or threatening comments about their gender, appearance or sexuality (AliJazeera, 2018). Thus, for some, entering the journalistic field is an even bigger threat, or a higher risk, if you may, as Indian female journalists – especially those who are well-known or public – fear being targets. Columnist Bachi Karkaria believes all objective journalists are “increasingly vulnerable” because they are seen as ‘soft’ targets (Kathuria, 2018).

Interestingly, even those women that work in ‘hard’ beats are still labelled as soft just because they are female. Their working role is in other words outweighed by their feminine role. Here is a crucial point when explaining why women struggle to join ‘harder’ beats. Not only are they seen as more fitting to work in softer news, but when labelling them as ‘soft’ they become targets that are more easy to attack than men are. The ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ news categories are thus not only affecting what women are supposed to be doing or writing about, but also have much wider implications on women’s lives. Joining news seen ‘hard’ heightens the risk of women’s safety. In light of that, it might be easier to understand Shrinivas’ thoughts. Many of the women who joined Telangana Today were either acquaintances or family friends of Shrinivas – and many of the young women, too, had older family members who knew Shrinivas’ well. Though in one way me may argue that not allowing women to join the ‘hard’ news might have led to the marginalization of women’s voices in the Bureau, he knew that women were an ‘easier target’. It might sound extremely heavy to label someone as a target, especially in a news paper seen quite conventional, but considering the fact that Shrinivas had been in the ‘game’ for over twenty years, he knew what rough game the hard news could serve.
Women are, as he told me, ‘always someone’s mother, someone’s daughter, someone’s sister’. Though his reasoning might have been well-meant, believing he is simply doing women a ‘favour’ when employing them in teams that predominantly work during the day, he is nevertheless not giving the women the chance to enter the harder news. Restricting women’s access to certain spaces will not only limit them, but it also recreates the image of women that are simply not supposed to be in such spaces, if its out at night, in certain news divisions or in other public places. Phadke et al believes that “when society wants to keep a woman safe, it never chooses to make public spaces safe for her” (2011, p. vii).

Balu, one of the journalists in the state Bureau who had recently returned to India after living ten years in the US, said his perspective on women and their capabilities had changed profoundly. When asking him about why there were no women working in the Bureau, he explained how

Balu: “The Indian society is still very patriarchal. We like to keep our women safe, behind a wall of protection. This is not to say women are not capable of doing political reporting, but... I think a lot of editors are scared that if crossing that line, if they do something, and then god forbid something goes wrong... People are probably worried about the fallout. Not in terms of their own careers or anything, but probably because they won’t be able to live with that guilt.

Louise: If something were to happen...?

Balu: Yes. And then most of us think, well – they are good for features. That’s where we have always seen them. And then we let it stay that way.

In other words, the potential risk of sending women out is something that may hold editors back in assigning women ‘harder’ beats. Editors might be scared that something may happen to their reporters. The feeling of responsibility might apply even more to Shrinivas who often knew the families of those working for him. Thus, not letting women work in the Bureau might have been underestimating the female reporters capabilities, but it is easier to understand why he chose to do so in terms of the responsibility he may have felt. This is in many ways a ‘bad circle’ – when fewer
editors allow fewer women out reporting, the few that are might experience the field
tougher for those joining the male reporting stream.

Because there are fewer women not only out on streets, but also as journalists, it
makes it harder for those few who enter these spaces. Reporting meant lingering out
in public and constantly accessing those spaces that are predominantly taken up my
men. A study conducted by Women and Media Group Mumbai, found that the most
common problem that women journalists are faced with, is late night work. They saw
how some workplaces used night work as an excuse to restrict the employment of
women, “instead of providing facilities to minimize the problem” (Joseph 2005, p.
47). In Telangana Today, cabs were provided but only to those working at the desk,
and when asking Shrinivas if he was thus more hesitant to hire women due to the
added costs, he firmly declined, but he did say that he sometimes felt he had to be
more liberal with women, even if it cost the organization more. Again Shrinivas
turned to women’s supposedly need for protection.

Shrinivas was not the only one who wanted to ‘protect’ the women. When I
interviewed Shanti on the 7th of April, she told me she too hesitated sending her
reporters out:

> I have been asking for a guy in the team because I need somebody to take care
of the evening assignments... I feel really bad for these girls, they are more
than girls for me, and they have been doing fantastically good. They don’t
hesitate going late in the night and I feel sorry. I keep asking them, once you
reach, please message, but they go for late evening assignments, they have
absolutely no problem... Hyderabad is much safer, so they are also confident
and they go, but I would feel better, it would be better if I have a man in the
team. For certain assignments and all, maybe I can send a guy, he can come
in late and go for evening assignments, but unfortunately... We are not getting
good guys to be part of the team, so we are happy being an all-womens team.

Shanti constantly talked of how she was afraid something would happen ‘if the girls’
had an evening assignment, and she preferred when they went to something in pairs
rather than alone. I also remember the few times I stayed back in the office to work on
an article, or waiting to go meet my friends at a nearby place, I was always asked by someone how I would get home, and if I had any transport. Of course, this was always well meant, and to be fair, in a way it felt good to be taken care of. The sense of always needing to be taken care of, or helped, does however also resemble how women are seen as someone who in some way need protecting.

The first woman to become a news editor and assistant editor in a Telugu newspaper, Vasanthalakshi, worked the night shift at the beginning of her career in 1970, *if only to prove a point*. Not wanting to be different from her male colleagues, and also, not wanting special facilities, she slept in the office (Joseph, 2005). In one way, it is great of Telangana Today to cater to female reporters working late, but as we have seen, the taxi service did not prove to be particularly safe either (ironically), and may imply that while Telangana Today do care and want their female employees to be safe, they do not go out of their way to make sure they are. They had one car taking all the women back, something that was both time-consuming and frustrating for many women after a long day at work. The special facilities that Telangana Today launched in order to cater to women working late was something that might have been initiated as a nice gesture, but seeing how little energy the management use for actually making sure these facilities did work, might also say something about that they were not really *that keen* on having women work late. Nikita, who used to work at the web-desk but then decided to leave for a better paid job, explained how:

Nikita: *We were two girls and the others were boys. Veronica joined later, and I was the only girl in the beginning at the web-desk. So he [Indrajeet] told us he didn’t want any girls in the desk because he thought it was difficult to manage timings, girl’s can only come in daytime, and during night it’s not safe for girls and all, so he doesn’t want girls. It’s easier to manage boys.*

Louise: *But I thought they would provide cabs?*

Nikita: *Yeah, but not really... They [in the web-desk] won’t give you night shifts, so there is no point of providing. Throughout my career in TT, I was working the morning shift. If it’s reporting, it’s a men’s world basically.*
Shrinivas, by saying women have certain drawbacks in the ‘physical world’ may help explain why he did not seem too keen on having women work late. Women were creative and good at what they did in Tabloid, he didn’t want to put “too much strain on women” by letting them work late. Here we may again turn to Ortner and her argument in ‘Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture’ and how women’s identity is linked with child bearing or socializing children. Because mothers are the early socializers of both boys and girls, Ortner (1974) argues that children develop a “personal identification with her” (Ortner, p. 81). The father, however, who is not involved in child care in the same way and is often more away from the house, is seen as a father in more abstract terms, rather than someone the boy can personally identity with. Boys, who “must ultimately shift to a masculine role identity”, thus identify with their father, and “the socialization of boys is transferred to the hands of men” (Ortner, p. 82).

This is crucial when explaining why women tend to be seen as someone who should not be out on the streets: women’s ‘natural’ role is in the house. Because girls personally identify themselves with their mothers already in early infancy, the “process of learning female role identity” is thus largely affected by the mother, and subsequently affects how daughters are taught to be and act as women (Ortner, 1974, p. 82). Some of these chores stem from practicalities – if women are more home, they naturally take care of cooking, but the pattern may however replicate also in the area of socialization, teaching women what their ‘natural areas’ of interest are. Even if Ortner’s essay is from the middle 70’s, it may however help explain why women tend to be assigned certain roles men do not. This is in some ways what the patriarchal society indeed is built upon – assigning men certain ‘natural’ social roles, and women other. The problem, as we have seen not only in Ortner’s essay from the 70’s, but also in Hyderabad in 2018, is that in order for change to come about, these ‘male’ and ‘female’ attributions are hard to change:

“The result is a (sadly) efficient feedback system: various aspects of woman’s situation (physical, social, psychological) contribute to her being seen as closer to nature, while the view of her as closer to nature is in turn embodied in institutional forms that reproduce her situation. The implications for social change are similarly circular; a different cultural view can only grow out of a
different social actuality; a different social actuality can only grow out of a different cultural view” (Ortner, 1974, p. 87).

Because women are seen as caretakers, they are someone who men then ‘want to protect’. This affects women in not only at home, but in social institutions, at work and out in public. When trying to protect the female reporters from ‘something bad’, he in some way reproduces and recreates a female subordination, even if he may not want to. The underlying message Shrinivas is sending, when confining women to ‘softer’ beats, is that the office culture is, on the whole, masculine, and that the few women that are there either are best suited to write about the traditional female task, making those who want to enter the ‘boys club’ of harder reporting tougher simply because ‘the boys’ are “being the invisible yardstick in which they have to live up to” (Zoonen cited in Carter et al, 1998, p. 33), and women do not really ‘belong there’.

In light of this, it might also be easier to understand why many women in Tabloid preferred working in an all-women’s team. Their capabilities were appreciated, and they also had the support of the other female reporters around them. In Tabloid they were not questioned or undervalued as they might have been in a ‘male’ beat, but rather valued and welcomed. Tabloid truly appreciated women and their perceived ‘natural’ status, celebrating a sense of womanhood that did not seem evident in the other teams.

Again, I must stress that women were not in reality ‘lower’ and thus fitted the female team better due to that ‘lower’ position. Rather, because the Indian society often views women as aligned more with nature, with their ‘prime caretaking role’, they were thus devalued and then perhaps easier assigned to traditional women’s beats or directed to parts where they indeed could combine their feminine, nurturing role with their job.

Of course, a lot of the women in Tabloid were young, and were not in any way caretakers or mothers, but pointing to Ortner’s argument may help us understand why such a said devaluation of women has commenced in the first place, and why it also is so hard for women to step out of these roles. Moreover, it is also easier to understand why these beliefs might be tough to change, as they in many ways are moulded and built into society’s ground pillars. Ortner argues that the only way to change this
'feedback system’ is to change “cultural assumptions” (1974, p. 87), something that men and women needs to be equally involved in and keen on changing. There seems to be, as we have seen, several reasons why men may want to uphold the system, keeping it as it is, but there are also men that are challenging this kind of ‘devaluing’ of women and what they are capable of, for example by refusing to post certain videos and thus challenge media coverage that is favoring violent incidents against women.

Throughout these chapters, we have also seen how women in Tabloid are challenging the ‘feedback system’ within the newsroom. Because the women push the traditional ‘soft’ categories and write articles that has a certain equality-focused outlook, they are – even if they small and one-step-at-a-time steps – helping to “change cultural assumptions” about where women and men are supposed to be or do or be interested in. Showing how women in the city drive taxis or how ‘supersheroes’ are emerging, challenge the notions of womanhood as something that is confined within the home. Women – and youngsters – who read these articles might think, ‘aha, well, then I guess I could do the same, too’, like Angang’s nephews who had been very interested in female superheroes and now preferred movies with a female lead character after reading her article. These are tiny steps, but they nevertheless may help change and reinforce the view that women indeed have roles that extend outside the house, and perhaps more importantly – they are showing the way for the younger generations and women that read these news.

**Swimming across an ‘ocean of barriers’**

So far in this chapter I have outlined the most central reasons why women are traditionally kept from ‘harder’ news. Seeing how the Indian society is restraining women, in many different ways, may help us understand how joining a space predominantly considered male is like. We may then ask, how are women in Tabloid then challenging these structures?
A great example of how women in Tabloid constantly worked to push the stories they worked on, and also could include their personal interests in them, is when Angang wrote about Wonder Woman. One evening as Rucili, Nikita, Angang and I sat out on the porch, gazing at the few stars that had managed to cut through the deeply polluted sky, we got into a particularly interesting conversation. After Rucili had mentioned an annoying episode with one of her seniors at work, Angang told us about the incident with Monis, the former senior boss in Tabloid. On Sundays, when Shanti was off, he had the responsibility. After watching Wonder Woman in the cinema one weekend, Angang wanted to write about the new wave of female heroines and how Wonder Woman changed people’s perception of how superheroes – or supersheroes, as she said – ought to be. She went to work in the morning, “so excited”, but her happiness soon faded when realising it was Monis – not Shanti – who was in charge of the stories that day. She pitched the story to him, telling us how “I was talking to him, explaining my idea, and he was like… What? What’s there? It’s not something we can cover”. She shook her head – clearly agitated – and even if it happened over a year ago, it was as if smoke came out of her ears when she said, “I wanted to punch him, you know!” Nikita then said, proudly, “Even in that situation, she managed to put it on the cover of the city edition!” We all burst out laughing, clapping and cheering – like a little group of hooligans. Angang smiled with triumph and continued;

*He couldn’t take it, that I won over him. When I know I am right, I will just continue to fight. People didn’t really want to argue with him, but I was like; I am going to get this story done. I explained to him, when he asked me the point of the story, that Wonder Woman is a kind of revolution and that the supersheroes are starting to emerge. He finally understood, but even then… I was like, OK, lets just talk to Lalithsir. So we went to talk to him, and Lalith was like, OK. Great idea. Monis was like boiling inside. We used to have two editions; a district edition and a city edition. If its really good, it goes for cover story for both editions, so they were actually like; You know what, you can put it in both editions. I was so happy. The article came out so well, ‘The rise of the superwoman’, everything was so good and I still have it actually, I saved it, it was the best article I ever wrote for TT. Everybody was so happy in Tabloid, “that’s a good story Angang”. Then it went for district cover as well,*
but then he… That was his only chance to knock me over, because he couldn’t knock me off in the main edition, but then he was like, no, let’s put Angang’s story inside the pages, not in the cover. Then I am like, I am tired fighting it off, so he actually put the article inside the newspaper, and I was like, oh my, this man. Shanti came back and checked the cover story and said, that’s a good story Angang. Later, Monis was telling me… very indirectly. Saying he was sorry.

Normally, when Shanti was present, she would support the girls – making sure they were heard and that their stories where accepted. Shanti in many ways safeguarded her team, making sure they got their ideas through. Because all the women felt they could speak whatever they thought off, they too contributed to foster the dynamics of the safe space. When Tabloid had male employees, the women did not feel the same safety. Thus, when taking the ‘risk’ of stepping out of the traditional softer beats, the women in Tabloid were thus dependant on Shanti. She also had a close relationship with both Lalith and Shrinivas, and thus, they would mostly support her ideas (as long as they correlated with their wishes). As we have seen, Shanti believed that having male employees would ease the burden of sending the women out on late-night events, but when they were an all-womens team, the safe space continued to stand as a strong component allowing the women to act safely within it’s walls.

Secondly, when being part of news seen as soft, they are given freer ties; because Tabloid is not seen as important, the editors do not really ‘care’ too much about what the women in Tabloid write but the first and second page. This allowed the women to experiment more than the men in the Bureau are allowed to do. This is something that had changed over the years, and if the news went ‘too far’ and was seen too serious, they were asked to ‘tone it down’:

Angang: We were always asked to tone down stories on women’s issues. When we toned it down way too much, it can kind of changed the idea and what we are actually trying to say… They would ask me to not always focus on such things, they would want different stories. I was also asked not to pick up stories that were… kind of hard, you know. I prefer writing in such a way that can bring a subtle change, more like developmental articles.
Louise: *Are there a lot of stories like that in Tabloid?*

Angang: *Not really, though we can always write around. For the cover-stories, yeah... We have a scope of writing certain things, but we really have to tone down the language. I enjoy that. I don’t enjoy writing really hard news articles, I like to write feature-ish, and I feel Tabloid is the right place for me to write such articles, because its kinda like, the feature-appeal is more interesting and it can appeal the reader more, I feel. We learn to write it in a very subtle way, not being direct or thought-provoking.*

Angang here explains that if the women in Tabloid write things that are thought-provoking, or in any way seen ‘hard’, they have to tone down the language. Using hard language is not seen fitting for news that are meant to be tabloid and ‘fun’ to read. Writing about the issues in a more subtle, ‘fun’ way, however, gives the women room to explore more. A thing that the women tended to do, was to make sure that the issues they took up were written about something that was in the entertainment section. Angang wrote about female issues and the rise of female superheroes, but angled it in a way that also included the new movie. For a lot of the women in Tabloid, angling the news in such a way that it also included themes of entertainment, i.e, made it easier to get it published.

That way, they work around the beats they are meant to focus on, trying to include gender-issues and social issues in a more subtle way. She also explains that while the editors care about the front pages, what’s inside is given less importance, and here they can explore more, which shows that women can and do experiment, and that they arguably have a larger canvas than the men in Bureau do, but that they too have to stay within certain lines (as not being ‘too bold’ or writing things that are negative of the government).
Conclusion

In trying to knit all the pieces together, and understand why women are directed towards the ‘softer’ parts of the newspaper, it becomes clear that there are a myriad of reasons why women are assigned softer beats.

One is due to the political ownership of the newspaper. Political reporting is, as we have seen, something that men are seen most capable of. Not only because political reporting is predominantly a ‘male’ sphere, but also because Indian society see politics as something women are not supposed to know anything about. Another, extremely important reason, is the safety aspect. Because public spaces are seen more dangerous for women at night, editors may hesitate to send women out. Shrinivas said that because the women working in Tabloid are always ‘someone’s sister, someone’s daughter’, he insinuated feeling somehow responsible for the things that might happen. The fear for protecting women does in other words not only affect the women themselves, taking cabs or planning their day around how getting from A to B, but also the whole community around women, their fathers, mothers, families and also, their bosses. Both Shrinivas and Shanti implied that they indeed felt some kind of responsibility for the women working in Telangana Today, and by directing them towards the softer beats of the newspaper, they were thus able to ensure the women had smaller chances of accounting risk at work.

Joseph (2005) writes how “overcoming such obnoxious attitudes and the complete absence of facilities, (…) women in the news agency managed to do even the late night shift, which ended at 2:30, if only to prove a point” (p. 154). Keeping women from the beads they want may of course seem like an excuse only to ‘keep them safe’. I however believe that the ownership and nature of Tabloid and what women are allowed to do, that may help explain why women in Tabloid might not see it in this way.

In some media organizations, working in hard news is the only way to rise in the profession (Joseph, 2005). I however argue that because the women in Tabloid were able to experiment more, and include ‘harder’ news in their articles when they wrote
them in a tabloid way, provided them with the positive aspects of working within a safe space while also being able to challenge the existing ‘soft’ beats they were working in. Joseph (2005, p. 160) writes how women have to choose between working in “active journalism” or have “clerical jobs”, though clearly, for the women in Tabloid, it is not as straightforward as that. They do not have to choose in the same sense as journalists in bigger news organizations might need to and are able to write – if ‘toning down their language’ – news that indeed are ‘hard’. Thus, they may be perceived as active journalists.

They have of course been instances, like Angang portrays, where articles are turned down, but unlike the men in the Bureau, who have to constantly push the political messages of TRS, the women in Tabloid write about issues in a much more broader sense. Not only are they able to write about news and “what politician says what”, but also about human-interest stories and international affairs and major events, like for example, they wrote about #Me-Too allegations in relation to Harvey Weinstein – news that indeed advocates important social issues.

Because women in Tabloid have carved out a safe space, where feminine values are actually appreciated, not devalued, they are valued as female journalists. Even though joining the ‘harder’ news is harder for women (or, as have seen, not yet even an option), women working in Tabloid nevertheless can explore both hard and soft news approaches within the safe space. Crucial here is that they have established a newsroom where their femininity is not only appreciated, it is also the first choice. Shanti only wants females in the team. She agrees that a male reporter would make things easier, but is also saying how she wants someone who could come late at night and then report, not joining the team in their normal working hours and thus not including the male reporter on a whole. Shanti works to keep the team an all-women’s team, where feminine – rather than masculine – traits are clearly appreciated.

Women in Tab have therefore found a kind of ‘golden middle way’ where they get to be part of a ‘soft’ space and partake in those benefits, whereas also being able to write ‘harder’ news. By not being seen strictly as ‘hard news reporters’, they are less likely to experience harassment and unpleasant situations – both from politicians they interview and also possible trolls. The women in Tabloid are not kept away from
writing about harder subjects, they just have to write about them in a more descriptive and tabloid way. In such a way, I argue that, returning to Ortner’s argument, women change the future in part by writing it, at least when they have opportunities to do so, as they do at Telangana Today. Seeing how women in Tabloid are challenging the existing ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ structures, even if they are subtly challenging them, they still are. They know, like Ortner, that they are up against something “very profound, very stubborn”, something they cannot simply “rout out by rearranging a few tasks in the social system” (Ortner, 1974, p. 68), but when working their way around things, addressing issues about gender equality and thus challenge existing gender structures, they know that therein also lies potential for change. Persuasively – though subtly – they are taking small steps to widen the symbolization of women as only soft, delicate, people who needs protecting, and rather, through the feminization of the space within the newsroom, help rebuild the image of female reporters as people whose perceived ‘softness’ does not stop them from writing about ‘hard’ issues.
Concluding Remarks

While for some, reporting is simply a job, for others it is more profound. At Telangana Today, and for the reporters in Tabloid, reporting is a tool of enhanced agency and empowerment.

Through the presentation of reflections and narrative accounts from male and female reporters in Telangana Today, I have described and analyzed some of the social barriers that females experience within the newsroom and, more importantly, what helps them overcome these. It is evident that the ‘safe space’ constructed in Tabloid plays an important role in this process. Shanti and the safe environment that the women in Tabloid have created allow women to challenge the ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ news categories.

I have also portrayed how women have developed effective voices in a context where they are expected to subordinate their voices to men’s, and how the ‘safe space’ has created an aura of respectability around the females that work there. The overarching mechanism, in my view, is dual: the strong sense of belonging and friendship that these women in Tabloid have has let them pursue their quest for writing meaningful and socially important news, and also, the strategies they have taught themselves then help legitimize and publish these articles. By carving out their own spaces within the newsroom, the women in Tabloid have created a space that gives them public voice.

Lastly, the ethnographic accounts of the female reporters aim to explore the possibility of writing articles as a tool for change within society. The positive feedback these women are receiving may indicate that they indeed have been successful in crossing traditional boundaries, reshaping and changing the notions of ‘softness’ and ‘hardness’ within the newsroom and the values the two categories are assigned – showing how being a ‘soft’ woman is indeed a positive thing, and that ‘softness’ is not a hindrance to writing ‘hard’ news.
Bibliography


