

## **The gendered nature of news consumption by children and youth**

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### **Abstract:**

This study examined the gendered nature of news consumption by children and youth in Israel, given the marginal role of women in the news world and the centrality of news in the construction of social life. A random sample of 931 8 and 11 year-old children completed a comprehensive survey about their news consumption in 2007. We found that girls are as interested in news as are boys and both genders use all media platforms to access news and have an interest in a wide variety of hard news topics such as war, terror, accidents, disasters, environmental issues, etc. Significant differences were found in the selection of a variety of news areas along traditional perceptions of “gender-appropriate” interests. As expected, girls were more family oriented in their news consumption, and reported higher levels of negative emotional reactions to news (fear, sadness). Girls were uniquely preoccupied with sexual crime, while boys seemed to be very marginally aware and/or concerned about that aspect of social life. The role that news stories may be playing in perpetuating such a strong sense of vulnerability and anxiety among girls as young as eight years old was particularly striking and requires further investigation.

**Keywords:** boys, conflict, emotion, fear, gender, girls, Israel, news, recall, sexual violence, sports, war

News production and consumption has been traditionally viewed as primarily a male sphere associated with the masculine dominance of the public sphere in general and the news professions more specifically. Given the central role that news may be playing in informing children and socializing them into public engagement and citizenship, it can be viewed as a

potentially important agent of social change towards gender equity in social life. The purpose of this study was therefore to examine whether – and what kind of – gender differences exist in the role news play in the lives of children raised in Israel – a country known for its turbulent public life and heavy news consumption.

A large survey of a random sample of schools in Israel was conducted in order to investigate these questions. Building on prior research on gender representations in the media and gendered differences of media consumption, this study aimed at exploring how consumption of news might be playing a role in the socialization of children into gender-differentiated roles and appropriate behaviors and attitudes related to their place in the public sphere.

There are several major reasons why studying the gendered nature of news consumption is of great importance in relationship to young people. The genre of news serves as a major socializing agent to the larger social world, political systems and cultural values. News informs us about the world outside of our physical reach, contributes to setting public agendas and debates, constructs our identities and loyalties and defines those that are “others” to us. More specifically, in relationship to gender, news also play an important role in presenting role models and career options, in framing possibilities and aspirations for inhabiting the adult world, and in relating narratives of “gender-appropriate” behaviors and attitudes.

Previous studies have documented that production of news worldwide is still largely a male endeavor. A recent 59 nation study of women’s employment in news companies (print and broadcast) documented that men outnumber women almost 2:1 in the profession. Men were also found to hold 75% of the top posts (Byerly, 2013). This structural state of affairs has been linked to the relative invisibility and marginalization of women in the content of the news produced worldwide. Several waves of the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) content-analyzing printed and broadcast news conducted in over 60 countries each time in the last two decades have documented an average of approximately 20% female characters appearing in the news as a whole, in all roles (e.g., news sources, eye witnesses, experts, commentators, presenters, journalists). In addition, women-centered news topics, let alone feminist perspectives on these topics, have been found to be negligible in the coverage of the world’s news (Gallagher, 2005). A content-analysis of news coverage focusing specifically on representations of young people in the news in the UK found that young males appeared five times more frequently than young females as main characters in news stories, and accounted for 70% of speaking time (Wayne, Petley, Murray & Henderson, 2010). This and other studies, such as an analysis of sports columns in US newspapers, have also found that young males are often associated with stories about sports and crime, thus continuing to reinforce notions of hegemonic masculinities (Hardin, Kuehn, Jones, Genovese, & Balaji, 2009). Israel, which was included in the samples of the above internationally-comparative projects, is much in line with the global data. Complementary analyses of images of women in the news in the Israeli printed and broadcast media also suggest that women continue to appear in traditional roles of

mothers and housewives and are often represented in the news as victims of violence and conflict (Lemish, 2002).

However, there is clear evidence from various studies in the US and Europe that young people's news consumption, as well as interest in public affairs, is on the decline (for an integrated discussion see Wayne, Petley, Murray & Henderson, 2010), causing great anxiety over the future of citizenry and democratic participation. Nevertheless, there is also accumulated evidence that children and youth are exposed to news more than has been previously assumed. Some of this exposure may be accidental, due to consumption habits of other family members or during times of major news-breaking events, as has been suggested by scholars in the UK and US (see for example Buckingham, 2000; Cantor & Nathanson, 1996; Messenger Davies, 2008). Research also demonstrates that young people actively seek exposure to news sources, albeit selectively, and that they wish to be more informed and involved in the world of news. When asked directly in interviews, they report dependency on news media for their knowledge about events happening around the world and in their own societies, as has been found in the US, UK and The Netherlands using a variety of methods and age groups (Blankemeyer, Walker & Svitak, 2009; Carter, 2013; Carter & Allan, 2005; Carter & Messenger Davies, 2005; Carter, Messenger Davies, Allan, Mendes, Milani & Wass, 2009; van der Molen, Valkenburg & Peeters, 2002). Research on young people's news consumption in Israel based on qualitative in-depth interviews with a convenience sample of 8-11 year-olds (Alon-Tirosh, 2012) as well as findings from a questionnaire of randomly sampled 8-17 year-olds found similar results (Lemish, 2014).

### **Gendered nature of news consumption**

Reviewing the limited literature on the gendered nature of news consumption suggests that it is a much understudied aspect of this field. Several studies that included gender related variables found little, if any, and mostly non-significant differences between girls and boys. For example: Gunter, Furnham and Griffiths (2000) did not find any main effects or interactions for gender in studying 10-11 year-old children's recall of news in an experimental setting in the US. Based on video diaries and questionnaires, Carter et al. (2009) found no significant gender differences in 8 and 15 year-olds' viewing of *Newsround*, the BBC news program for children in the UK. However, several findings seem to be surfacing consistently from studies which are very much in line with traditional framings of expected gendered norms. First, boys have been found to be more interested and heavier consumers of news in general. For example, Barnhurst and Wartella (1998) found in their study of life histories written by university undergraduate college students in the US that men reported reading newspapers and watching television news more often than women. Women were more attuned to gendered structure of the newscast itself, noted female newscasters and commented on their personalities.

Another main finding involves exhibition of emotions related to news reports. As expected, girls report more fearful reactions and more empathy towards the suffering of others. For example, a random sample survey in the US of parents of 5-17 year-olds

reported that girls expressed more fear to the war in Iraq news-related dangers than did boys, and exhibited more behavioral manifestations of being upset (Smith & Moyer-Gusé, 2006), thus confirming earlier studies in the US (including Hoffner & Haefner, 1993; Smith & Wilson, 2002; Valkenburg, Cantor & Peeters, 2000). Several interpretations have been offered for this consistent finding. The most prevalent one associates expressions of emotions to socialization processes into gender-appropriate behaviors, according to which it is much more legitimate for girls to express anxiety and fear, to report physical reactions, and to deal with their emotions more effectively. Boys, on the other hand, were found in various studies conducted in Israel for example, to tend to suppress emotions, and thus in the long run may be more vulnerable to stress (see review by Klingman, Sagi & Raviv, 1993). Support for such gender differences was also found in a survey of 11 year-olds (van der Molan & Kojin, 2007); and in phone-interviews with a random sample of 7-12 year-olds (van der Molen, Valkenburg & Peeters, 2002), both conducted in The Netherlands. A different line of argumentation suggests that boys and girls differ in their processing of news content: boys tend to approach news more cognitively, focusing on the technical and logistic aspects of the content, while girls tend to approach the news more emotionally, focusing on the human relationship and suffering aspects. Finding in support of these gender differences come from several studies, including, for example, a survey and focus group conducted in the UK in relationship to the Gulf War (Morrison & MacGregor, 1993) as well as from two qualitative case-studies in Australia using a variety of age-appropriate methods with children ranging from 2 to 12 year-olds about their recollections of the war (Gillard, Haire, Huenders, & Meneghel, 1993). Interviews with 9-12 year-old children on their reactions to the news coverage of the explosion of the spaceship Challenger in the US shortly after the event (Wright, Kunkel, Pinon, & Huston, 1989) provide additional support. It is interesting to note that Barnhurst and Wartella's (1998) life histories study cited above found that while both genders recalled fear related to news, men primarily recalled childhood incidents, while women talked about such incidents throughout their lives using much stronger language. Women also mentioned anger reactions to the news more than men, and expressed anger about the violence in the news much more frequently than men.

A third finding that appears consistently in the literature from various countries suggests that girls and boys have different areas of interests in the news, much in line with general media tastes and preferences. For example, not surprisingly, Barnhurst and Wartella (1998) found in the US that men expressed significantly more interest in sports than women. In response to a survey in the UK, boys 8-15 year olds were found to show a greater interest in news focusing on war and technology, while girls demonstrated a stronger interest in celebrities and social gossip (Wayne, Petley, Murray & Henderson, 2010). Parents of 5-17 year-olds in the US claimed in a survey that their sons were more attracted to the war-related violence in the news than were their daughters (Smith & Moyer-Gusé, 2006), as was also demonstrated by an analysis of thousands of children's web-posting on children's news programs' web sites in Germany and Belgium (Nikken & Götz, 2007). During the onset of the war in Iraq, 9 year-old boys in a qualitative case-study the US were found to be more

pro-war than girls and conceived of the war as a personalized battle between Presidents George W. Bush and Saddam Hussein. Girls were a lot more concerned for casualties of the war and the hardships for the Iraqi people than the boys (Seiter, 2007). Studies of the Gulf War, a decade earlier, found similar results in the US. Interviews with children in 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grades revealed that boys watched more news stories that dealt with the background to the war and the technology used in it, while girls seemed to be more interested in human aspects of the war. Girls were also trying to avoid watching news coverage of the war more than boys (Hoffner & Haefner, 1994). Finally, a panel study of first grade children in Germany also found that boys were somewhat more informed about politics than girls (Van Deth, Abendschön & Vollmar, 2011).

Taken as a whole, these differences can be ascribed to gender socialization processes suggesting the construction of masculinity in association with the public sphere, and conflicts within it more specifically, while femininity is relegated to the traditional expectation to be more empathetic and caring.

### **The Israeli context**

The special circumstances in which children and youth in Israel live today offer an outstanding opportunity to study the role of the news media in their lives and to expand our understanding of its gendered nature. The combination of a culture of heavy news consumption as well as the intense reality of a deeply divided society involved in constant armed conflict raises important questions regarding the role of news in children's lives and developing citizenship and the cultivation of attitudes related to gender differences.

Previous research on news and the political socialization of children in Israel has demonstrated that television, for example, has a central role in shaping kindergartners' understanding of what is perceived as "important" in society (Lemish, 1998) as well as attitudes of teenagers towards the Israeli-Arab conflict more specifically (e.g., First, 1997). These contributions to the construction of a political world view were found to be related to the amount of time adolescents devoted to watching television news and to their attitudes towards television (e.g., the degree of their desire to gain information from television; the dependency on television as a political-information source; the self-perception of vulnerability to television influence). The contextualizing role of the family was highlighted in other studies, demonstrating that family conversations and critical debates over news items presented on television are central to understanding political socialization of adolescents in Israel (Liebes & Ribak, 1992; Ribak, 1997).

As an electoral democratic political system with high levels of development and literacy, Israel mostly enjoys free press (Cohen, 2013), although that freedom is restricted in the occupied territories and at time of war (Freedom House, 2012). Israel has a vibrant media scene, with privately owned newspapers, a mixture of private and public broadcast media, and many affiliated news websites. The dominant language of news sources is Hebrew, the spoken language of the Jewish majority of the country. However, the two major minority groups – Arabs (comprising about 20% of the 8 million population) and

former USSR immigrants (of mixed Jewish and non-Jewish origins) have a thriving media in Arabic and Russian languages respectively. Some of these news sources can be defined as media designed for them by the majority media owners and others are produced by them and carry different content and perspectives. Both populations also rely heavily on sources in their native languages originating in the Arab world and in former USSR countries, delivered mostly via satellites as well as internet sites (Elias, 2009; Jamal, 2009; Kabha & Caspi, 2011).

The content of the news on Israeli media reflect the country's highly conflicted and politicized nature, the many traumatic events resulting from constant war and terror, and the anxiety over the relationship of the status of Israel with its allies on one hand and enemies on the other. News about the Israeli-Palestinian and Arab conflicts dominate the news agenda, as well as related national and international topics and relationships with the world's leaders, mainly the US (Cohen, 2013; Cohen & Loffler-Elefant, 2006). Israeli television news emphasize domestic news (around 50%), devote 19% to foreign news and additional 31% to hybrid news of both types. In comparison to the other 16 countries in one comparative study, domestic news in Israel were the highest in their emphasis on issues of internal order, military and defense (Cohen, 2013). It is important to note that Israelis are overall heavy news consumers, with news programs coined fondly in the past as the "tribal camp fire" (Cohen, 2013, p. 305). However, they are also quite critical of media coverage of contested issues, suggesting a "love-hate" relationship with the media (Cohen & Loffler-Elefant, 2006, p. 237).

Finally, it is important to consider the unique socio-political and cultural context of Israeli society as it presents challenges to gender equity. While women have achieved substantial parity in many areas of life, they are still restricted in many other ways. As a nation struggling with existential threats throughout its history, it is highly conflicted over the relationship with the Arab world in general and the Palestinians in the occupied territories more specifically. These circumstances have deep implications to the attention given to internal social issues in general and gender equity more specifically. The centrality of the politics of security and war dominate much of the masculine public sphere while relegating women into the traditional emphasis on family and childbearing in the private sphere. In addition, the strong hold that religious and nationalistic forces have on public, as well as private life take priority over egalitarian principles and impinge on women's rights. Of particular concern is the rate of domestic violence as well as the growing phenomenon of trafficking of women into Israel for the sex industry in the region. News representations of these issues, and social life more generally, reflect societal norms and continue to perpetuate and normalize gender inequality (Lemish, 1999; Lemish, 2002).

Given the marginalized role of women in the news world, the centrality of news in the construction of social life, and the growing discourse of concern around the role news might be playing in cultivating a more participatory public sphere among future generations of citizens, we have set in this study to examine the gendered nature of news consumption

by children in Israel and the socializing role news might be playing in the lives of girls and boys in Israel towards gender equity.

### **The study**

The present article is based on a larger study on the role of news in the lives of children and adolescents in Israel, which included a wide array of research questions and hypotheses, using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. More specifically, the general research topic exploring gender differences was supported by the following sub-questions in comparing consumption and attitudes toward news by children and youth:

(a) **News consumption:** A set of questions inquired about the nature of exposure to news media: How much exposure? To which media? Under what conditions and social contexts (e.g., location, presence of others, special events)? For what uses and purposes?

(b) **Interest, attitudes and feelings towards the news:** What interests children in the news media? What are the roles assigned to the news in society? Which emotions do the various news stories arouse in them? Which specific news items do they remember?

Here we report only those results that directly relate to the comparison between the younger group of male and female participants. Based on the relevant literature previously referenced, we expected gender differences to emerge on a variety of measures and have derived the following hypotheses:

- H1:** Television will remain the central source of news for both genders in comparison to other media.
- H2:** Girls and boys will have different motivations for news consumption.
- H3:** Boys will have a greater interest in news than girls.
- H4:** Girls and boys will rate news differently as an important source of their knowledge of the social-political world.
- H5:** Girls and boys will differ in their preferences for news topics along traditional gendered divisions.
- H6:** Girls and boys will hold different attitudes about news.
- H7:** Girls will report stronger emotional reactions to news consumption.

Taken together, these hypotheses predict that news consumption and related attitudes and emotions are distinctly gendered and in line with the traditional masculine domination of the public sphere represented by news institutions and cultural artifacts. Finally, given the important socializing role we assign to news, we were interested in finding out what specific news events that made an impression on them will girls and boys spontaneously recall. Given that previous studies do not allow us to make a specific prediction, we stated this interest as a research question.

## **Method**

The larger study referred to above was conducted in 2007 and was comprised of two major methodological steps: a large survey with a random sample of schools with children and youth 8-18 years old, and face-to-face interviews with a non-representative sample of children and youth in that age range. We report here on only half of the sample and on some of the survey results alone (other aspects of the study – differences between minority and majority children; and children’s wishes to change the news are reported elsewhere, Lemish & Alony-Pick, 2014; and Alon-Tirosh & Lemish, 2014 respectively). We have chosen to focus on the gendered aspect of this study with 8 and 11 year- old participants for a number of reasons. This age group of middle childhood, pre-puberty “tweens”, is characterized by the development of independence and exploration of the world around them. Children of this age group are already capable of using sophisticated language to express themselves and are gradually breaking free from an egocentric perspective of life that is typical of early childhood. Yet at the same time, they are still restricted by some cognitive limitations typical of their stage of development, as well as their developing social and physical skills. This is also the age of growing interest in peer groups that takes them gradually away from the family and into the wider social world. They become more prone to peer pressure and receptive to a host of exclusion practices, including gender stereotyping, bullying, and victimization (Author, 2011). This age group is also crucial for the development of gendered identity, as tendencies for separatism and bonding with same-gender friends become more notable (Maccoby, 1998). Tweens are considered to be too young and dis-interested in mainstream news, and yet, as we have stated above, are often exposed to news and prone to its influence.

## **Sample**

A representative national sample of schools was drawn from complete lists of schools in Israel provided by the Ministry of Education (following approval by the Israeli Ministry’s Legal Department and academic Human Subject Committee). Once schools were randomly selected, the school principals were approached with a request for collaboration. The vast majority agreed on first contact, and in the very few cases that they did not – the next school in the list was approached. Following a positive response, the schools were randomly assigned into the different grade categories and the principals were notified which grade would be included in the study. Finally, given that most schools had more than one class within the grade category (e.g., five 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classes) the selection of the specific class was determined by logistics and scheduling. Special education classes were excluded from the sample. At the end of the process we were able to recruit 17 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (8-9 year-olds) and 16 6<sup>th</sup> grade (11-12 year-olds) classes from 33 schools from all regions and demographics of the country, of which 7 were defined as Arab-Israeli schools and 5 as Jewish-religious schools. The main variables of interest for the larger study of which this is a part were age, gender, and social class. Ethnicity, religiosity and geographical location were also important to consider, as they are highly related in Israeli society with political views

and nature of exposure to specific news sources (see for example Lemish & Pick-Alony, 2014).

Overall, 931 completed questionnaires were collected: 497 of third graders comprising 53.4% of the sample, and 434 of six graders comprising 46.6% of the sample. Of the sample, 55.3% (503) were females and 44.7% (406) were males. Twenty two children did not complete gender information and were thus excluded from the analysis (See Table 1)

**Table 1: Sample demographics\***

	<b>Boys (N = 406)</b>	<b>Girls (N = 503)</b>	<b>Total (N=909)</b>
<b>Age</b>			
8 years old	235	247	482
11 years old	171	256	427
<b>Religion</b>			
Jewish	248	296	544
Arab	150	194	344
<b>Socioeconomic Status</b>			
Low	143	203	346
Mid-high	262	300	562
<b>Conflict zone</b>			
Not exposed	298	355	653
Exposed	107	148	255

\* Missing information about gender – 22 children; missing information about socio-economic status and conflict zone – 1 boy.

## Questionnaire

The self-administered questionnaire had two versions: a shorter one for the third graders comprised of 29 questions; and a longer one for the sixth graders, comprised of the same 29 questions plus an additional 22 questions, totaling 51 questions. The two questionnaires were designed to address the age difference between the two groups and the corresponding attention span, expressive skills, and self-reflexive abilities. The questions tackled the following issues: habits related to the consumption of news (which media, amount, with whom, when); attitudes towards news and their personal and societal roles; understanding of the constructed nature of news; recall and recognition of news stories; and news and social-political activism. While most of the questions were closed-options (multiple-choice, scales, etc.), the questionnaire also included several open-ended questions - the responses to one of them, namely, “write down a news story that you remember that made a special impression on you,” will be presented below as well.

Scales developed especially for this study and reported here were of the following types:

**Media of news consumption (H1):** How often do you do the following? (including 12 statements such as: I read news online; I watch television news; I listen to radio news in the car; I talk about the news with friends ) – the scale included the following options: 1= never; 2 = less than once a week; 3= once-twice a week; 4= three-four times a week; 5= every day or almost every day; 6= a few times a day.

**Motivations for news consumption and level of interest (H2, H3):** How much does each of these sentences describe you accurately? (including 14 statements such as: I have an interest in the news on my own; I have an interest in the news because it's important to be informed; it is important to know what is happening in the country; I am interested in the news when something special happens - like terrorist attack, war, disaster; I am interested in the news because my parents or teachers say it is important) – the scale included the following options: 1= not true at all; 2= somewhat untrue; 3= somewhat true; 4= true; 5= very true.

**Contribution of different sources to knowledge (H4):** How much does each of these contribute to your knowledge about what's happening in the country? (including 16 options such as: internet; television news; parents and family; religious institutions) - the scale included the following: 1= does not contribute at all; 2= contributes very little; 3= contributes; 4= contributes a lot; 5= not applicable.

**Interest in news topics (H5):** How interested are you in these news topics? (including 20 options such as: Palestinians and Arabs; sports; education; accidents; health) – the scale included the following: 1= very interested; 2= interested; 3= not too interested; 4= not interested at all).

**Attitudes toward the news (H6):** A few series of attitudinal questions were presented to the children. First they were asked: In your opinion, people who are regularly interested in the news are - (including 7 statements such as: educated; rich; successful at work; good citizens) – the scale included the following options: 1= much more than most people; 2= somewhat more than most people; 3= like most people; 4= somewhat less than most people; 5= a lot less than most people.

Then they were asked: To what degree do you think that what appears in the news is – (including 5 statements such as: important, really happens, influences me) – the scale included the following options: 1= always; 2= often; 3= sometimes; 4= rarely; 5= never.

Finally, they were also asked to mark to what degree they agree with the following statements about television news (including 11 statements such as: news is for adults only, when I watch the news I feel I learn a lot; I would have preferred to see other topics on the news) – the scale included the following options: 1= I strongly agree; 2= I quite agree; 3= I somewhat agree; 4= I don't agree at all.

**Emotional Reactions (H7):** How often do you feel the following when you watch news on TV (including seven statements such as: I feel afraid; I feel sad; I feel bored) – the scale included the following options: 1= never; 2= rarely; 3= sometimes; 4= often; 5= always or almost always.

### **Procedure**

Four trained research assistants (Jewish for the Jewish schools with Hebrew questionnaires and Arab for the Arab schools with Arab questionnaires) coordinated the visits and distributed the questionnaires in person during school hours, and in the presence of the home teacher of the class. Completing the questionnaire required an average class-session of approximately 50 minutes.

### **Analysis**

Close-ended responses from all questionnaires were logged into an SPSS program and undergone statistical analysis. For purpose of analysis, several of the scales were reversed such that 1 was always the lowest score and 5 the highest. For most variables, a MANOVA was conducted to examine the differences between girls and boys. For single items, an ANOVA was conducted. A thematic analysis of responses to the open-ended questions was conducted by one trained coder according to conventional qualitative content-analysis procedures. These include thorough reading of the responses several times in order to group them according to keywords and themes emerging in the responses. Several rounds of this process gradually refined the themes and allowed for the development of a grounded category. For example, individual stories describing traumatizing depictions of injuries, death and destruction caused by specific incidences of terrorism created a category of “terror”, and individual stories describing memories of stories about cases of rape, sexual assaults, child-molestation and pedophiles were integrated into a category named “sexual crime” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

### **Results**

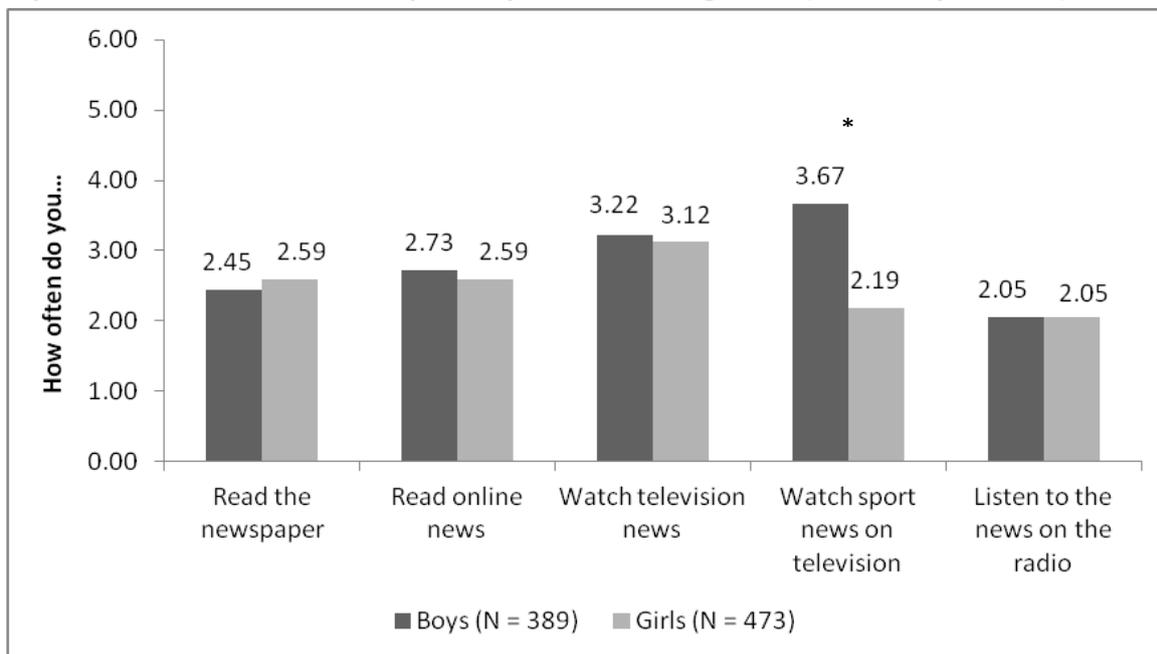
We present below some of the gender-related results of this study emerging from the analysis of responses to the questionnaire. The analysis focuses on the differences between girls and boys on several measured variables, including the media used and motivation for news consumption, the role they assign news as a source of knowledge, the specific areas of interest in the news, several attitudes related to news, and their emotional reaction to news. In addition, we provide comparative data for the interaction between gender and age differences on several of these measures. The quantitative data is supported by an analysis of responses provided to one of the open-ended questions related to recall of news story that left an impression on them.

**Type of media used for news consumption**

We start by examining the different media used by participants as sources of news. We conducted MANOVA with the different media as a dependent variable in order to examine the differences between boys and girls. First, as suggested in H1, both girls and boys ranked television as their main source for news consumption in comparison to reading news online, in newspapers or listening to the news on the radio. Looking into habits of television news consumption, the only difference found between girls and boys was that girls reported talking about the news in class ( $M = 2.59, SD = 1.27$ ) more than boys ( $M = 2.41, SD = 1.29$ ),  $F(1,846) = 4.03, p < 0.05, partial \eta^2 = 0.01$ . In general, both girls and boys reported that first of all they watch the news and talk about the news with their family, in comparison to watching and talking about it with friends, at school, or alone.

The internet came in second place after television news, especially for boys who ranked it as a more common source for news consumption than girls but not significantly so. The most dramatic gender difference, quite as expected, was in boys' higher level of consumption of sport news  $F(1,860) = 153.41, p < 0.00, partial \eta^2 = 0.15$ . No differences were found in the use of newspapers and radio as sources for news consumption (see Graph 1).

**Graph 1: Hours of news consumption by medium and gender (8 and 11 year-olds)**



**Scale range** – How often do you do the following: 1 = never; 2 = less than once a week, 3 = once or twice a week; 4 = three or four times a week; 5 = almost every day or every day; 6 = few times a day. Read the newspaper  $F(1,860) = 1.88, ns$ ; Read online news  $F(1,860) = 1.31, ns$ ; Watch television news  $F(1,860) = 0.77, ns$ ; Watch sport news on television  $F(1,860) = 153.41, p < 0.00$ ; Listen to the news on the radio  $F(1,860) = 0.00, ns$ .

### ***Reasons for news consumption***

We predicted in H2 that boys and girls will have different motivations for news consumption. A MANOVA was conducted to examine these differences. The results suggest that both boys and girls 8 and 11 years-old say they watch the news primarily because they believe it is important to know what is "happening in the country" (Boys:  $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ , Girls:  $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ,  $F[1, 340] = 1.22$ , *ns.*) and to know what is "happening in the world" (Boys:  $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ , Girls:  $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ,  $F[1, 340] = 0.02$ , *ns.*). Children also claim that they watch the news because it interests them (Boys:  $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ , Girls:  $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ,  $F[1, 380] = 0.60$ , *ns.* However, when "something special happens", girls take more interest in the news ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) than boys ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ),  $F(1,340) = 6.57$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $partial \eta^2 = 0.02$ . Furthermore, girls also say they watch the news because teachers and parents say it is important ( $M = 2.12$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) more than boys ( $M = 1.88$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ),  $F(1,340) = 4.07$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $partial \eta^2 = 0.01$ . Thus, H2, according to which boys and girls will have different motivations for watching the news, was only partially supported.

When considering H3, according to which boys have a greater interest in the news, we find as we have seen above, that girls are just as interested in the news as boys their age, and even take more interest in the news than boys "when something special happens". Therefore, in contrast to expectation, we reject the hypothesis that boys have more interest in the news than girls.

H4 predicted that boys and girls will rate news differently as an important source of their knowledge of the social-political world. A MANOVA was conducted to examine the differences between boys and girls in the importance assigned to different sources of information. Table 2 shows the differences in 11 year-old boys' and girls' evaluation of the level of contribution of different news sources to their knowledge of "what is happening in the country." The only medium boys evaluated as a more valuable source of news than girls was the internet. Interestingly, boys ranked it as the most important source, even higher than news on television (despite the fact that they spend more time with television news). For girls, however, parents and family were ranked as the most valuable source for news followed by school and the internet coming only in third place. In general, girls assigned higher levels of importance to several sources of information such as youth groups, books, and magazines. No differences were found in the level of contribution to knowledge assigned to parents and family, news on the radio and radio in general, television news, children's news on television and television shows that are not directly related to news, friends, newspapers and after school activities. Thus, H4 was partially supported, since there were quite a few gender differences in ranking the importance of various news sources.

### ***Interest in news topics***

According to H5, 11 year-old boys and girls were expected to differ in their preferences for news topics along traditional gendered divisions. A MANOVA was conducted to examine these differences. When 11 year-olds were asked specifically about news subjects, boys

**Table 2:** Source of contribution to knowledge about the world by gender (11 year-olds)

Medium	Boys (N = 99)	Girls (N = 132)	Manova
The internet	3.43 (0.83)	3.15 (0.93)	$F(1, 229) = 5.17, p < 0.05,$ $partial \eta^2 = 0.02$
School	2.91 (1.01)	3.20 (0.92)	$F(1, 229) = 5.08, p < 0.05,$ $partial \eta^2 = 0.02$
Books	2.49 (1.14)	2.95 (1.14)	$F(1, 229) = 9.23, p < 0.00,$ $partial \eta^2 = 0.04$
Youth groups	2.01 (1.04)	2.38 (1.01)	$F(1, 229) = 7.34, p < 0.00,$ $partial \eta^2 = 0.03$
Magazines and Journals	2.15 (0.95)	2.49 (1.02)	$F(1, 229) = 6.73, p < 0.01,$ $partial \eta^2 = 0.03$
News on television	3.35 (0.89)	3.11 (1.02)	$F(1, 229) = 3.45, ns.$
Parents and family	3.24 (0.98)	3.41 (0.85)	$F(1, 229) = 1.91, ns.$
Newspapers	3.21 (0.89)	3.11 (0.96)	$F(1, 229) = 0.63, ns.$
News on the radio	2.68 (1.10)	2.86 (1.10)	$F(1, 229) = 1.51, ns.$
Friends	2.61 (1.03)	2.80 (1.01)	$F(1, 229) = 2.13, ns.$
Television Shows (not news)	2.44 (1.06)	2.51 (1.06)	$F(1, 229) = 3.45, ns.$
After school activities	2.38 (1.15)	2.47 (1.16)	$F(1, 229) = 0.31, ns.$
Children's TV news	2.34 (1.22)	2.54 (1.14)	$F(1, 229) = 1.54, ns.$
Radio (not news)	2.09 (0.99)	2.20 (0.99)	$F(1, 229) = 0.75, ns.$

Scale range – level of contribution: 1 = not at all; 2 = a little, 3 = to some degree; 4 = a lot; 5 = no use / do not know (the fifth option was omitted from the analysis). Numbers in parentheses reflect SDs.

reported significantly more interest in the categories of crime and violence, sports, foreign news, army and security, science and technology, transportation and infrastructure, politics, and economics, all of which are traditionally considered masculine areas of interests. The only significant difference in girls' topic preference was their higher interest in education. They also showed more interest in other traditionally female areas of culture and health but

the differences were not significant. No significant differences were found in level of interest between boys and girls regarding most of the “hard core” news in Israel: Palestinians and Arabs, war and terror, accidents and disasters and law, although boys reported higher interest in these traditional masculine areas of interest (see **Table 3**). Thus, H5, according to which boys and girls will differ in areas of interest in news along traditional gender divisions, was supported to a large degree but not completely.

**Table 3:** Interest in different news topics by gender (11 year-olds)

Topic	Boys (N = 132)	Girls (N = 216)	
Crimes and Violence	3.29 (0.91)	3.07 (1.00)	$F(1, 346) = 4.16, p < 0.05,$ $partial \eta^2 = 0.01$
Sports	3.25 (1.02)	2.31 (1.05)	$F(1, 346) = 66.41, p < 0.00,$ $partial \eta^2 = 0.16$
Foreign news	3.05 (0.97)	2.78 (0.99)	$F(1, 346) = 5.86, p < 0.05,$ $partial \eta^2 = 0.02$
Army and Security	3.01 (1.07)	2.47 (1.02)	$F(1, 346) = 21.91, p < 0.00,$ $partial \eta^2 = 0.06$
Science and Technology	2.98 (1.13)	2.66 (1.07)	$F(1, 346) = 7.13, p < 0.05,$ $partial \eta^2 = 0.02$
Education	2.66 (1.11)	3.03 (1.00)	$F(1, 346) = 10.26, p < 0.00,$ $partial \eta^2 = 0.03$
Transportation and Infrastructure	2.57 (1.04)	2.23 (0.98)	$F(1, 346) = 9.43, p < 0.00,$ $partial \eta^2 = 0.03$
Politics	2.43 (0.93)	2.16 (0.97)	$F(1, 346) = 6.82, p < 0.05,$ $partial \eta^2 = 0.02$
Economics	2.39 (1.06)	2.16 (0.98)	$F(1, 346) = 4.20, p < 0.05,$ $partial \eta^2 = 0.01$
Nature disasters	3.42 (0.92)	3.40 (0.79)	$F(1, 346) = 0.04, ns.$
War and Terror	3.39 (0.85)	3.28 (0.91)	$F(1, 346) = 1.23, ns.$
Accidents and Disasters	3.30 (0.86)	3.22 (0.87)	$F(1, 346) = 0.71, ns.$
Culture	3.23 (0.96)	3.31 (0.91)	$F(1, 346) = 0.61, ns.$
Weather	3.12 (0.94)	3.10 (0.91)	$F(1, 346) = 0.04, ns.$
Health	2.98 (1.04)	3.13 (0.91)	$F(1, 346) = 1.74, ns.$

Palestinians and Arabs	2.92 (0.96)	2.82 (1.01)	$F(1, 346) = 0.92, ns.$
Social and Welfare	2.85 (1.14)	2.86 (1.02)	$F(1, 346) = 0.01, ns.$
Environment	2.97 (1.07)	2.94 (0.97)	$F(1, 346) = 0.05, ns.$
Law	2.75 (1.16)	2.61 (1.08)	$F(1, 346) = 1.36, ns.$

Scale range – level of interest: 1 = not at all; 2 = a little, 3 = to some degree; 4 = a lot. Numbers in parentheses reflect SDs.

### Attitudes towards news

H6 stated that boys and girls will hold different attitudes about the news. Our older participants were asked a series of questions tapping upon their attitudes. First, they were asked to evaluate different traits of people who regularly take an interest in the news and a MANOVA was conducted to examine the differences between boys and girls in these evaluations.

Both groups ranked the traits of these people first of all as “updated.” No gender differences were found in evaluating these people as educated or successful at work. However, boys more than girls ranked people who regularly take interest in the news as interesting (Boys:  $M = 3.69, SD = 1.15$ ; Girls:  $M = 3.37, SD = 1.04, F[1, 380] = 4.79, p < 0.05, partial \eta^2 = 0.01$ ), more successful in their studies (Boys:  $M = 3.48, SD = 1.22$ ; Girls:  $M = 3.22, SD = 1.08, F[1, 38] = 5.04, p < 0.05, partial \eta^2 = 0.01$ ) and as good citizens (Boys:  $M = 3.67, SD = 1.20$ ; Girls:  $M = 3.41, SD = 1.09, F[1, 38] = 4.85, p < 0.05, partial \eta^2 = 0.01$ ).

Another question asked children to evaluate five qualities of news: as important, interesting, really happening, influencing them and influencing others. No gender differences were found in evaluating the news as important or in claiming that news influences them. Both boys and girls also thought the news happened in reality and no differences were found in the evaluation of news as interesting or as influencing others.

No differences were found between boys and girls in all other items (i.e., “the news are silly”, “the news are for adults”, “the news are about subjects that are related to me”, “I think the news are too serious”, “lots of times there are words and phrases in the news I do not understand”, “I would prefer to watch other topics in the news”, “people take the news too seriously”, and “I would like it if there were more news that are for my age”). Thus we find that H6, according to which boys and girls have different attitudes toward news, was partially supported.

### Emotional reactions to news

According to H7 girls were expected to report stronger emotional reactions to news consumption in comparison to boys. A MANOVA was conducted to examine the differences between boys and girls in reported feelings. We found that on the whole, girls of both age

groups reported stronger emotional reactions in all categories, except for “feeling more mature.” Significant differences in reported emotional reactions to the news emerged concerning expression of two feelings: sadness and fear. As expected according to H7, in both areas girls reported stronger feelings than boys. However, in first place for both boys and girls was the item “boredom” (see table 4). Thus H7 was partially supported.

**Table 4:** Emotional reactions to the news by gender (8 and 11 year-olds)

Emotion	Boys (N = 350)	Girls (N = 430)	Manova
Sadness	2.13 (1.35)	2.56 (1.34)	$F(1, 778) = 19.09, p < 0.00,$ $partial \eta^2 = 0.02$
Fear	1.76 (1.12)	2.52 (1.28)	$F(1, 778) = 75.36, p < 0.00,$ $partial \eta^2 = 0.09$
Boredom	2.55 (1.54)	2.73 (1.45)	$F(1, 778) = 2.96, ns.$
Feel more mature	2.36 (1.57)	2.33 (1.47)	$F(1, 778) = 0.08, ns.$
Happiness	2.13 (1.23)	2.20 (1.14)	$F(1, 778) = 0.74, ns.$
Anger	1.95 (1.29)	2.13 (1.36)	$F(1, 778) = 3.37, ns.$
Feel more important	1.91 (1.36)	2.07 (1.39)	$F(1, 778) = 2.31, ns.$

Scale range – feelings strength: 1 = not at all; 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes; 4 = oftentimes; 5 = almost always. Numbers in parentheses reflect SDs.

### News stories that made an impression

Given the previous literature on the significant gendered-differences in emotional reactions to news, we included a specific open-ended question to solicit unaided recall of news items that “made a special impression on you”. We assumed that both boys and girls will be able to recall specific news events that made an impression on them but were unable to predict whether these will be different in nature. Over 50% of participants in both the 8 and the 11 year-old groups provided specific information on such stories

On the whole, both boys and girls shared stories of a wide range of topics focusing mainly on hard news of war and terror. This is no surprise, given the geo-political environment in which these children are being raised and the dominance of these topics in the news coverage in Israel described above. For example: *The topic of the war in the north... I have many friends in the north and I worry about them very much. I was worried that my friends could die* (11 year-old boy); *The Second Lebanon War, when they showed again and again the situation in the cities in the north, like Haifa. The sirens, and people*

*running in the streets, and sitting in the shelters, the buildings shuttering. And the bombing, and the hits, and the injured and the dead (11 year-old boy). During the war there were so many scary things... when they said that a katyusha [rocket] fell in the area where I live (11 year-old girl). That they killed the people in the army and the Muslims went to war (8 year-old boy). Similarly, the threat of nuclear weapons in the hands of Iran, a topic high on the Israeli news agenda, was mentioned by both boys and girls as a source of great anxiety: The Iranian threat... it is very scary to know that in a few more years I won't be alive (11 year-old girl); The threat to build a nuclear reactor in Iran that all of us can die from it (11 year-old girl); That Iran will succeed to build a nuclear missile (8 year-old boy). This, and many other examples, clearly suggest that what children remember from the news, and what makes a significant impression on them and is perceived as relevant and scary, is highly compounded by their social-political context (see Lemish & Alony-Pick, 2014).*

The second category of hard news that left strong emotional impressions on both boys and girls related to car accidents which pose a concrete and understandable existential danger. For example, *the accident that took place near Ashkelon, when two cars crashed into each other and one of them didn't stop at the red light. I was scared that this can happen to me (11 year-old girl). That lethal car accident that happened that two children became orphaned, the death of their parents, and the poor children (11 year-old girl). That somebody crossed in a red light and the children got hurt (8 year-old boy). That the bus tipped over and some people died and the man who was in the car was injured and the driver of the bus also was injured (8 year-old boy).*

While the scope and goal of this article does not allow for detailed linguistic analysis of the written outputs of boys' and girls' stories, these examples suggest that while both boys and girls share stories that made an impression on them, girls are freer in personalizing the stories and in using strong emotional words (e.g., *I was scared; I was afraid it will happen to me*). Boys, on the other hand, used more often collective language about "us" or "them" (e.g., *it is dangerous; I was afraid for my friends*) rather than a language expressing personal fear.

Gender was found to be a very clear prism through which children process the news, both cognitively and emotionally. Despite the similarities described above, gender differences were most pronounced in the stories provided by girls and boys of all populations. The most striking finding was that on the whole, girls were predominantly preoccupied with stories focusing on sex-offenders. Girls recalled in great detail two major news stories that dominated the Israeli news some five-six months before this study took place: the escape from prison (and re-capture after two weeks) of a dangerous serial-rapist – Benny Sela; and the murder of an elementary school girl – Tair Rada – in her school's bathroom. Girls' responses to the open question personalized the stories and expressed strong emotions of identification and immediate fear for themselves or their loved ones. For example, in reference to the escaped-rapist story: *Benny Sela was running wild in the streets. I was afraid he would do that to me (8 year-old girl); I was scared that Benny Sela the rapist got out of jail... I was afraid he will come to my home (11 year-old girl); The case of*

*Benny Sela that once I was really afraid and even was a bit scared to go out at night alone and also my parents were very worried. When I saw weird people I was scared that perhaps it is Benny Sela and my friends were also very scared (11 year-old girl).*

In reference to Tair's murder, girls wrote: *I was scared that they killed Tair Rada in the bathroom (8 years old girl); the murder of Tair at school was horrifying and was stuck in my head for months. That things like this can happen in a school, an educational place... (11 year-old). There was this case that made me fearful of Tair Rada that was killed by a murderer. I was so scared that they won't catch the murderer and he will come to my school so I didn't go to the toilets by myself at school any more (11 year-old girl).*

In addition, girls shared news-stories about sex-offenders who were employing new media to target their victims. For example, *I saw this about a pedophile that all the time wanted to be touched in his genitalia and it made me feel something horrified and unpleasant... he corresponded with a girl and wrote to her all kinds of things like I will come to you and I will touch your genitalia (11 year-old). There was this case of a man who pretended to be 17 and sexually harassed a girl on ICQ [Instant Messaging] and on the phone and threatened her. It scared me that something like this can happen to anybody, meaning, to me too (11 year-old). One man who was like 60 corresponded with girls saying he is a young man and he met them and raped one of the girls. He got close to them through ICQ which is my favorite program (8 year-old girl).*

There are clear age differences in the focus of the story, the sexual ambiguity, and the language used, reflecting girls' development and emotional, cognitive, and sexual maturation. What also comes across very clearly from these stories is the fact that they are not recalled in isolation: the role of parents, friends, and other significant others in discussing these threats added to the heightened emotions and to priming these stories in their memory. The stories also resonate with the many studies that have documented women's fears of rape and suggest that these are nurtured by the socialization of girls from a young age to a sense of vulnerability to rape and the learning of a whole range of expected behaviors to avoid it. The combined fear of rape and the responsibility placed on girls' shoulders to prevent it has been also tied to the many nuanced (and less nuanced) societal ways of placing the blame of sexual crime on the female victims (Roze, 2002).

In summary then, the qualitative analysis and the sheer volume of girls' stories of emotional reactions to sexual crime suggest that indeed boys and girls differ in recalling the news stories that made an impression on them.

## **Discussion**

Despite some general assumptions about the gendered nature of news, there is very limited systematic research focusing specifically on the gendered nature of news consumption. This study provides significant evidence to suggest both confirmation of expectations in several areas, as well as some surprises and unexpected insights. Most of the hypotheses based on the existing literature were only partially supported, suggesting that the gender differentiation around news consumption is far from being simple and self-explanatory.

Overall we found that girls, between the ages 8 and 11, are as interested in news as are boys in that age range – suggesting that the over-generalization of news as a masculine sphere is diminishing and requires a much more nuanced and complex analysis and interpretation. Both genders use all media platforms to access news and both have an interest in a wide variety of hard news topics, such as war, terror, Palestinians and Arabs, accidents and disasters, environmental issues, etc. - which represent the core of news reporting in Israel.

Significant differences were found with boys consumption of sports-news and evaluating the internet as a source of news more highly than girls. These differences are in line with boys' and girls' media preferences and uses in general, suggesting that sports remains highly associated with masculinity, and internet use, while heavily accessed by all youth, is still perceived as technologically masculine and thus gender-differentiated. There were also differences in a selection of a variety of news areas of interest: Boys demonstrated more interest in what is perceived to be "male-appropriate" areas such as crime and violence, sports, foreign affairs, technology, science, the military, politics and economics while girls rated education higher, which is perceived to be more "female-appropriate". Girls were also more family- and authority-oriented in their news consumption: they reported watching television news more with others and assigned more importance to the role of significant others in learning about current events. These findings are consistent with previous research about the gendered nature of media-culture in general (see Lemish, 2014; Mazzarella, 2013) thus lending them additional credibility.

It is important to note that interest in the news was rated similarly by both genders on the various measures, including in statements such as "having an interest in the news" and "news influence me" thus refuting the expected gender roles of active male interest in news and girls' greater susceptibility to influence. However, as we have seen, girls reported higher levels of negative emotional reactions of fear and sadness to news while no significant gender differences were reported regarding other emotions or a sense of boredom. While this study was not designed to untangle the question of actually experiencing an emotional reaction versus the legitimacy of expressing it, the qualitative data offers some meaningful insights. Both boys and girls offered a wide range of examples of news stories that stirred an emotional reaction in them. Many of the stories had to do with the hardships of war and devastation, car accidents, natural disasters, and some human interest stories. Girls, however, were uniquely preoccupied with sexual crime, while boys seemed to be very marginally aware and/or concerned about this aspect of social life. The role that news-stories may be playing in perpetuating such a strong sense of vulnerability and anxiety among girls as young as eight years old is particularly striking in a society such as Israel, where the dominance of the Israeli-Arab violent conflict is such a central and formative theme of everyday life. For anything else to become so prominent in girls' consciousness' suggests how deeply rooted it is in the structural perception of a gendered existential threat. While it is true that the two main stories related by the girls (i.e., the serial-rapist and the girl's murder) had an unusual prominence in the Israeli news

that could have biased the findings, both have taken place some five-six months prior to the data collection. Furthermore, the War in Lebanon, a highly traumatic event that lasted 34 days, was constantly at the headlines of all news sources, and affected a large portion of the country. This event ended only three months before the escape of the serial rapist, and yet, was only marginal in the emotional stories related by the girls in comparison to the sexual crime stories. It is hard to dismiss the centrality of the fear of rape in these girls' and young women's lives and the role news coverage may be playing in perpetuating this fear.

Girls generally tended to relate their emotional reactions in personal terms, focusing on their own feelings and their own – or their close loved ones' – safety and wellbeing. Boys, on the other hand, tended to use more detached and collective language and to remove the immediate danger away. That gender is performed, among others, through language, has been documented and discussed extensively (see for example, Lemish, 2005). The centrality of communicative processes in constructing gender relationships has been put forth by Bonvillain (1993), among others, noting that gender distinctions in all societies are articulated through language: "Through communicative processes, cultural models of gender are both portrayed and reinforced, contributing to the socialization of females and males into their expected roles and also creating their ideas about themselves and each other" (p. 213). Therefore, a thorough and systematic linguistic analysis of the hundreds of written responses would be the next logical step in order to be able to validate these initial impressions.

Many of the findings reported here regarding the gendered nature of news consumption can be complicated by providing interaction with the variable of age, particularly with the older age group of 14-17 year-olds in the larger study that has not been reported on here. As boys and girls grow into their adolescent years some of the gender differences take different forms. For example, concern over driving and car accidents, as well as serving in the military, become more prominent themes among young males in the twelve-grade group, as earning driving licenses and approaching mandatory military service become a reality. Young women's concerns over internet-pedophilia seem to subside with age, perhaps because they develop a more realistic approach to the risks of life-on-line and better coping skills.

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that the consumption of news by children in Israel is far from being perceived as a predominately masculine domain. Instead, it is a social terrain where gender identities are being constructed and performed, and where socializing into gender roles is cultivated and nurtured. Thus consideration of gender similarities and differences in news contents and consumption need to be a part of the discussion of this central aspect of the public sphere. This is particularly important given the recent growing interest in the role of news in young people's lives, its implications for civic engagement, the empowerment of young girls, and the building of citizenry. The advent of new technologies through which both boys and girls are selectively accessing, reacting, and distributing news (e.g., on social networks and through use of mobile media) is of particular

interest, as these offer the promise of a more inclusive public sphere for promoting gender equity.

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