BEYOND THE GLASS CEILING: A DIALECTICAL FRAMEWORK OF AGENCY AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION FOR CHINESE FEMALE SPORTSCASTERS

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Abstract

This article addresses the complex professional experiences of female sportscasters in China's male-dominated media industry by proposing a new theoretical framework. While existing research often focuses on either structural constraints or isolated acts of resistance, this paper argues for a more integrated, dialectical perspective. It introduces the "Dynamic Gendered Field and Agentic Identity Construction" framework, which synthesizes theories of field, power, performativity, and intersectionality to analyze the mutual constitution of structure and agency. The framework conceptualizes the media industry as a "dynamic gendered field" that imposes structural pressures and examines "agentic identity construction" as the micro-level process through which female professionals strategically navigate these pressures. To demonstrate the framework's utility, the paper presents a concise case illustration of a Chinese female sportscaster, "Xiao Hong." The analysis reveals how she strategically converted "emotional labor" from a stereotyped constraint into a form of symbolic capital, thereby performing a type of micro-resistance and successfully reconstructing her professional identity. The paper concludes that this dialectical framework offers a more nuanced and holistic tool for understanding how professional identity is negotiated, performed, and redefined within gendered industries, contributing critical insights across media studies, gender studies, and the sociology of professions.

Introduction

The proliferation of female sportscasters in global media signifies a notable, albeit complex, stride towards gender inclusivity in a traditionally male-dominated domain (Bruce, 2016). While their increased visibility on screen is undeniable, it often obscures the persistent and nuanced gender politics that shape their professional lives, opportunities, and identities (Hardin & Shain, 2006). This issue is particularly salient in the People's Republic of China, where a rapidly commercializing media landscape, marked by intense market competition and technological disruption, converges with deeply rooted cultural norms and state influence (Burgh, 2004). This unique context produces a distinct set of pressures and possibilities for female media professionals that cannot be fully understood through a purely Western theoretical lens. While a growing body of literature has analyzed the on-screen representation of female sportscasters, focusing on issues of sexualization and marginalization (Peng et al., 2022; Tuggle & Owen, 1999), and others have explored audience reception (Baiocchi-Wagner & Behm-Morawitz, 2010), a critical gap remains. There is a lack of systematic inquiry that holistically connects the *macro-level* structural forces shaping their roles with the *micro-level* agentic strategies they proactively employ to navigate their careers and construct their professional identities (Long & Ismail, 2023).

The sports media industry has long been identified as a "gendered field" (Bourdieu, 1984), a social arena where professional credibility, institutional norms, and pathways to success are underpinned by ideologies of hegemonic masculinity (Creedon, 1994; Wenner, 1998). Research predominantly from Western contexts has consistently highlighted the challenges female professional's encounter. These include being relegated to secondary, less analytical roles, often as sideline reporters or "atmosphere" hosts, facing relentless scrutiny of their physical appearance over their expertise (Knight & Giuliano, 2001), and navigating the proverbial "glass ceiling" in career progression (Smith et al., 2012). Such studies provide an essential foundation by meticulously mapping the terrain of structural inequality. However, a persistent focus on constraints risks inadvertently portraying female professionals as passive recipients or 'cultural dopes' (Lynch, 2012), thereby eclipsing their capacity for active negotiation and strategic resistance. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis requires a theoretical shift from a primary focus on structural determinism to a more dialectical perspective that equally scrutinizes the agentic practices through which individuals navigate and respond to their circumstances.

Recognizing this, more recent scholarship has begun to address the concept of "agency"—the capacity of individuals to act independently and make their own free choices within enabling and constraining social structures (Giddens, 1992). In media studies, agency has been explored through various valuable, yet often disconnected, lenses. For instance, scholars have examined the "performative" aspects of on-screen roles, drawing on Butler's (Butler, 2011) work to understand how gendered professional identities are constructed through repeated acts and stylizations that can both reinforce and subvert norms. Others have pointed to the importance of networking, community building, and mentorship as forms of resistance and empowerment that allow women to accumulate crucial social capital (Ety, 2024). While these studies offer critical insights into specific agentic practices, they seldom integrate these practices into a comprehensive model that also accounts for the pervasive structural forces of the field. A significant theoretical challenge remains how to develop an integrated framework that can simultaneously analyze the powerful, often invisible, structural forces and the creative, resilient, and strategic agency enacted by the women themselves in a dialectical relationship.

This paper seeks to address this gap by proposing, elucidating, and illustrating such a framework: the "Dynamic Gendered Field and Agentic Identity Construction" framework. This article posits that understanding the professional lives of Chinese female sportscasters requires moving beyond a simple dichotomy of structure versus agency. Instead, it necessitates a theoretical lens that can capture the ongoing, dialectical process in which the gendered field shapes individuals,

while individuals, through their agentic practices, concurrently challenge and reshape the field. To achieve this, the paper is structured as follows: first, it will detail the theoretical underpinnings and an operational model of this new framework. Second, it will provide a concise, yet rich case illustration drawn from a larger qualitative study to demonstrate the framework's analytical utility in practice. Finally, the discussion will reflect on the framework's broader implications for studying gender, media, and professional identity, particularly within non-Western and evolving media ecosystems.
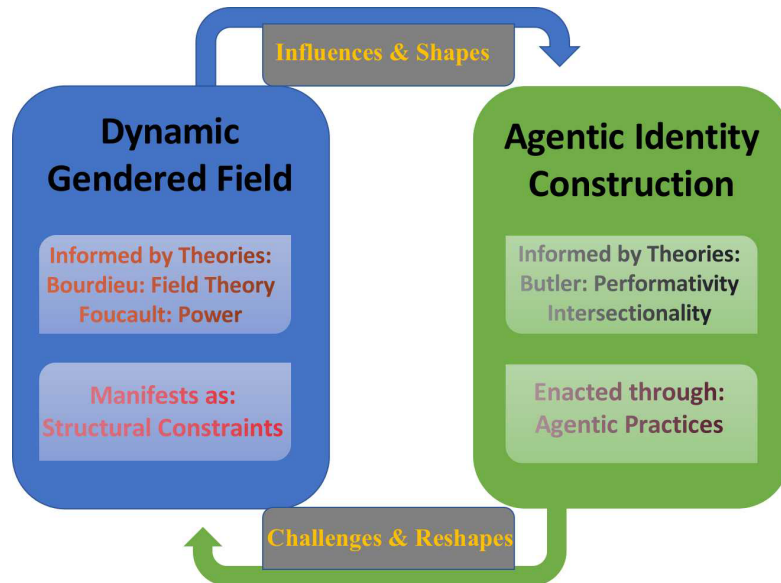
The Framework: Dynamic Gendered Field and Agentic Identity Construction

The central theoretical challenge in understanding the experiences of female sportscasters in China lies in bridging the conceptual gap between macro-level structural forces and micro-level individual practices. A comprehensive analysis must avoid the analytical pitfalls of either structural determinism, which risks portraying individuals as mere puppets of social forces, or a romanticized view of individual agency that overlooks the very real constraints of power. To address this, the "Dynamic Gendered Field and Agentic Identity Construction" framework is built upon a deliberate synthesis of four key theoretical pillars, drawn from sociological and feminist scholarship: Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, Michel Foucault's work on power, Judith Butler's theory of performativity, and the principles of intersectionality. Each provides a unique yet complementary lens, and their integration creates a robust analytical tool.

The framework's structural dimension is primarily informed by Bourdieu and Foucault. Bourdieu's field theory provides the foundational concept of social space (Bourdieu, 1984). A "field" (champ) is a structured arena of competition with its own specific rules, hierarchies, and forms of logic (doxa), where agents vie for position and resources armed with different forms of capital. This study employs this concept to frame the Chinese sports media industry not merely as an industry, but as a specific "gendered field," where the very definition of professional "capital" (e.g., analytical skill vs. aesthetic appeal) is deeply inscribed with gendered values. Foucault's conceptualization of power as productive—as a force that creates norms and subjectivities rather than simply repressing desire—complements this by explaining how these gendered rules are maintained (Foucault, 1990). Foucault argues that power operates through discourse and institutions to produce specific "docile bodies" and regulated subjects. This lens is crucial for understanding how the "ideal" female sportscaster is constructed and regulated within the field, not through overt force, but through pervasive, often invisible, disciplinary mechanisms like media commentary, audience expectations, and institutional hiring practices. Together, Bourdieu and Foucault provide the analytical tools to map the powerful, yet often subtle, structural landscape that female sportscasters must navigate.

To analyze the individual's role and response within this landscape, the framework turns to Butler and intersectionality. Where structural theories can sometimes fall short in explaining individual action, Butler's theory of performativity offers a powerful corrective (Butler, 2011). Butler posits that gender is not a stable, internal identity but an ongoing "performance" constructed through repeated, stylized, and often policed acts. This concept is adapted here to conceptualize professional identity not as a fixed state, but as an agentic, yet constrained, performance. It allows for an analysis of how female sportscasters strategically "do" their professional roles in ways that can both comply with and subtly subvert field expectations. Finally, the principle of intersectionality, originally articulated by Crenshaw, is integrated as an essential critical layer (Crenshaw, 2013). It ensures that the analysis remains sensitive to how gender interacts with other social categories, such as class, age, educational background, and regional identity, to produce unique and varied experiences of privilege and oppression. This prevents a monolithic view of "women" and enables a more nuanced

understanding of their diverse strategies and challenges. In concert, these four theoretical foundations create a powerful dialectical framework capable of exploring the intricate dance between structure and agency in the construction of professional identity.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Diagram
Note. This figure developed by the authors for this study.

The Macro Level: Conceptualizing the "Dynamic Gendered Field"

The first pillar of the proposed framework conceptualizes the Chinese sports media industry as a "Dynamic Gendered Field." This conceptualization moves beyond viewing the industry as a mere collection of organizations and individuals; instead, it frames it as a structured social space governed by its own specific logic (*doxa*), unspoken rules, and constant struggles for legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1984). Within this field, what constitutes professional "success" is not objectively defined but is a product of ongoing competition where certain attributes and practices are valued more than others. The gendering of this field is profound and operates through the naturalization of hegemonic masculinity, where traits stereotypically associated with masculinity—such as analytical rigor, an encyclopedic knowledge of statistics, a commanding assertive presence, and even a certain style of cynical humor—are often implicitly positioned as the "gold standard" for professional credibility (Creedon, 1994; Messner, 2002). This establishes the fundamental "rules of the game" that all participants, male or female, must contend with.

This gendering directly impacts the forms of capital that agents can effectively acquire, deploy, and convert. Following Bourdieu, "capital" is the currency of the field, and its value is field-specific (Bourdieu, 2018). In the context of sports media, cultural capital might manifest as deep-seated sports knowledge and the ability to perform a specific type of analytical discourse. Social capital relates to professional networks and influential connections ("guanxi"), which in this industry have been historically and remain predominantly male-dominated, creating barriers to entry and mobility for women. Symbolic capital, the most crucial form, refers to prestige, recognition, and legitimacy, which is the ultimate prize in the field's struggles. The central struggle for female sportscasters, therefore,

often involves having their own forms of capital systematically devalued or misrecognized. For example, strong interpersonal skills or the ability to foster genuine audience connection—objectively valuable assets in broadcasting—might be dismissed and symbolically categorized as mere "feminine charm" rather than being codified as legitimate professional capital. This process of valuation and devaluation is a subtle yet powerful mechanism that not only maintains but actively reproduces the field's gendered hierarchy, forcing women to either acquire masculinized capital or find alternative ways to make their own capital count.

Furthermore, the operation of power within this field is best understood through a Foucauldian lens. Power is not simply a top-down, repressive force but is productive and disciplinary; it circulates through the field, shaping subjects through pervasive discourses and norms (Foucault, 1990). The constant and intense media scrutiny of female sportscasters' appearance, attire, personal lives, and even their tone of voice functions as a powerful form of disciplinary power (Guy Harrison, 2019). It subtly encourages a state of continuous self-surveillance and adherence to a particular feminine ideal that must be "pleasing" yet "not too distracting". This "power-knowledge" nexus, where specific knowledge about "what works" for female broadcasters is produced and disseminated, defines who is considered an "appropriate" or "credible" subject within the field. This often ties a woman's professional legitimacy directly to her successful performance of these gendered aesthetic and behavioral norms, making her body a primary site of professional assessment.

Crucially, the framework emphasizes the "Dynamic" nature of this field. The contemporary Chinese sports media field is not a static, monolithic entity but is in a state of constant flux, influenced by several key forces. First, rapid marketization and commercialization have introduced new, often contradictory, logics centered on ratings, audience engagement, and celebrity culture, which can sometimes create new niches for female broadcasters who can attract specific demographics. Second, the explosive rise of digital media, social platforms, and streaming services has fragmented audiences and created alternative spaces for content creation. This allows some women to bypass traditional institutional gatekeepers and build their own brand of expertise and followership, thereby accumulating new forms of symbolic capital outside the established hierarchy (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012). Third, shifting socio-cultural attitudes towards gender in urban China, while slow and uneven, are gradually creating a more discerning audience that increasingly values and demands female expertise. These dynamic forces mean that the rules of the field are continuously being contested and renegotiated. It is within this complex, contested, and ever-changing structural landscape that female sportscasters must construct their professional identities. This understanding of a dynamic, rather than static, field is essential for appreciating the possibilities for agency, which will be explored in the next section.

The Micro Level: Agentic Identity Construction

While the "Dynamic Gendered Field" describes the structural landscape that constrains and enables, the second pillar of the framework—"Agentic Identity Construction"—focuses on the micro-level practices through which individuals actively navigate this terrain. This pillar posits that professional identity is not a static attribute possessed by an individual, but rather a fluid, ongoing, and often fraught project that is actively and strategically constructed. To conceptualize this intricate process, the framework draws primarily upon Judith Butler's theory of performativity, supplemented by the critical lens of intersectionality, to illuminate how individuals' "author" themselves within structures of power.

Butler's seminal work argues that gender is not an internal essence or a fixed role, but a "performance" constituted through the stylized repetition of acts (Butler, 2011). Crucially, this is not a voluntary, theatrical performance akin to an actor choosing a role on a stage. Rather, it is a

compulsory performance, enacted within a highly regulatory social framework that rewards conformity and punishes deviation. This framework adapts Butler's concept to analyze professional identity. The "professionalism" of a female sportscaster is similarly not a natural state, but a series of relentless performances—of speech, attire, gesture, and knowledge display—that must be continuously and successfully enacted to be recognized as legitimate within the gendered field. This performative dimension is the very site of agency. While the field attempts to compel a specific type of feminine performance (e.g., pleasing, non-threatening, aesthetically appealing), the compulsory nature of performance is never perfect. Agency, in this Butlerian sense, lies in the possibility of flawed repetitions, variations, resignification, and "subversive repetition," where norms are inhabited in ways that subtly destabilize them (Butler, 1993).

Thus, "Agentic Identity Construction" involves a repertoire of strategic practices that often exist in tension. Compliance is one such practice, where individuals perform in alignment with dominant norms to gain entry, secure employment, and build initial acceptance. This is a pragmatic survival strategy, but it is not without cost, as it may lead to internal conflict or a sense of inauthenticity. This is often coupled with micro-resistance, which involves small, often covert, acts that challenge, or subtly modify expectations. For example, a female sportscaster might conform to aesthetic standards in her attire but simultaneously use a more assertive, data-driven rhetorical style typically associated with male expertise. She might "perform" femininity through her smile, while her questions to athletes are sharp and probing. These acts, while seemingly minor, accumulate over time to gradually expand the boundaries of what is considered an acceptable female professional performance (Jenkins & Finneman, 2018).

Furthermore, this process involves the active leveraging and conversion of capital. As discussed, while some forms of capital are devalued, individuals can strategically convert or reframe them. The strategic performance of "emotional labor," for instance, can be reframed from a stereotypical feminine burden into a unique professional skill for building audience rapport and trust, thereby creating a new form of symbolic capital that is difficult for male colleagues to replicate. However, this strategy also carries risk, as an over-reliance on emotional performance can reinforce the very stereotype one is trying to escape. Community building and networking, particularly with other female professionals, are other critical agentic practices. They create alternative "fields of validation" and spaces for resource sharing that counter the isolation and competitive pressures often experienced within the male-dominated field (Ety, 2024).

Finally, the framework insists on an intersectional understanding of these practices (Crenshaw, 2013). The specific strategies and degree of freedom in identity construction available to a female sportscaster are not solely determined by her gender. They are intricately shaped and modulated by the intersection of her gender with her age (a "veteran" broadcaster may possess the symbolic capital to engage in more overt resistance than a newcomer), her educational background (which may grant her more recognized cultural capital), her specific media platform (digital media may offer more flexibility than state television), and her class position. An intersectional lens prevents us from universalizing the experience of "female sportscasters" and allows for a more fine-grained, contextually sensitive analysis of the diverse and creative ways in which identity is negotiated. This focus on performative, strategic, and intersectionally-informed practices provides the necessary micro-level counterpart to the macro-level analysis of the field.

The Dialectical Model: How the Framework Operates

The "Dynamic Gendered Field and Agentic Identity Construction" framework, therefore, does not posit a simple unidirectional relationship between structure and agent. Instead, it operates as a

dialectical model that captures their mutual constitution. The model can be summarized in a two-stage, cyclical process.

First, the "Dynamic Gendered Field" exerts structural pressure on the individual. As detailed, this occurs through the imposition of gendered norms, the valuation of specific forms of capital, and the operation of disciplinary power. These forces create a "regulated space" that defines the expected roles and acceptable performances for female sportscasters, effectively setting the terms of engagement and shaping the terrain upon which their identities must be constructed. This represents the structural determination aspect of the model, where the field actively shapes the subject.

Second, in response to and within this regulated space, individuals engage in "Agentic Identity Construction." Through a repertoire of performative and strategic practices—from compliance and micro-resistance to capital conversion and community building—they navigate, negotiate, and sometimes contest these structural pressures. These agentic practices are not external to the structure but are enacted *within* it, often using the very tools and norms of the field in subversive ways. Crucially, the cumulative effect of these micro-level agentic acts has the potential to feed back into and reshape the macro-level field itself. Over time, successful identity constructions can introduce new forms of valued capital, expand the definition of a "credible" professional, and subtly alter the "rules of the game."

In essence, the framework conceptualizes a continuous feedback loop: the field shapes the agent, and the agent, through identity work, reshapes the field. It is this dialectical, co-constitutive relationship that provides a nuanced and holistic understanding of the ongoing struggle and negotiation inherent in the professional lives of female sportscasters. This model thus provides a clear analytical pathway for the case illustration that follows.

A Case Illustration: Proving the Framework's Utility

Methodological Note and Case Introduction

To demonstrate the analytical utility of the "Dynamic Gendered Field and Agentic Identity Construction" framework, this paper presents a concise case illustration. The data for this case is drawn from a larger qualitative study on the professional experiences of female sportscasters in China, which employed semi-structured, in-depth interviews. It is important to note that the purpose of this illustration is not to present comprehensive empirical findings, but rather to serve as a "proof of concept"—to show how the proposed theoretical framework can be operationalized to illuminate a real-world narrative. All names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect participant anonymity.

We focus here on the case of "Xiao Hong," a sportscaster in her early thirties working for a major provincial television network. At the time of the interview, she had over seven years of experience in the industry. Her narrative is particularly illuminating as it vividly encapsulates the central tension between structural pressures and agentic responses. Early in her career, despite possessing strong analytical knowledge of football, Xiao Hong found herself consistently typecast into roles that foregrounded her appearance and required her to perform a specific type of supportive, emotionally attuned femininity. She was positioned not as an analyst, but as a "pleasant presence" meant to balance the supposedly more serious, masculine expertise of her male co-hosts. This initial positioning within the gendered field serves as the starting point for analyzing her subsequent journey of identity reconstruction.

The Narrative: Performing and Resisting within the Field

Xiao Hong's narrative begins with a candid acknowledgment of the explicitly gendered role she was expected to fulfill. "In the beginning, the director was very direct," she recalled. "He said, 'We need a female face here. The audience, mostly male, gets tired of just data and tactics. You bring a different energy, make it more lively'." This directive positioned her not as an analyst, but as a performer of femininity tasked with managing the show's emotional atmosphere. Initially, she adopted a strategy of **compliance**, a pragmatic choice for survival in a competitive field. She dressed in fashionable attire, maintained a constant pleasant smile, and played the role of the enthusiastic, less knowledgeable counterpart to her male colleagues. However, this performance came at a cost. "For a while, I felt like a fraud," she admitted. "I had my own analysis, my own opinions, but I had to swallow them. I smiled on camera, but sometimes I felt empty inside. It was a struggle between the 'me' they wanted and the professional 'me' I wanted to be."

This internal conflict became the catalyst for a shift from passive compliance to conscious, strategic performance. The turning point was her meticulous analysis of audience feedback, not just for critique, but for opportunity. "I noticed some viewers would comment, 'Xiao Hong makes the show so much more relatable' or 'I love her interactions with the guests'," she explained. "I realized that this 'relatability' and 'interaction'—what my bosses called 'feminine charm'—was actually a professional skill. It was a form of broadcasting capital that was being undervalued." This realization marked the beginning of her agentic reframing of "emotional labor."

Instead of viewing it as a burden, Xiao Hong began to strategically perform and capitalize on her emotional and interpersonal skills with a newfound sense of purpose. She meticulously prepared for each show, not just by memorizing analytical points, but by researching personal stories and crafting targeted questions designed to elicit emotional responses from athletes and guests. "My male colleagues could list a player's stats from ten years ago, and that's impressive," she said. "But I could ask a question that made them talk about their mother, their first pair of boots, the feeling of that devastating loss. That's a different kind of depth. It's about telling the *human* story within the sport." This was a form of micro-resistance; she was fulfilling her 'emotional' role, but on her own terms and elevating it to a level of professional mastery that her colleagues could not easily replicate.

This strategic performance gradually but surely altered her position within the field. As her unique, in-depth interview style gained popularity and became a signature feature of the show, she was given more airtime and more significant segments. She leveraged this growing symbolic capital to slowly introduce more of her own analytical insights during discussions. "Once the audience trusts you and connects with you as a person," she noted, "they are far more willing to listen to your opinions, even the serious, tactical ones." Her journey vividly illustrates a sophisticated process of identity construction: she inhabited the stereotypical role assigned to her but did so with such strategic intent and professional skill that she ultimately expanded and redefined the role itself, transforming it from a decorative position to one of unique, indispensable value.

Analysis through the Framework's Lens

Xiao Hong's narrative provides a compelling instantiation of the "Dynamic Gendered Field and Agentic Identity Construction" framework, illustrating how its theoretical components operate in tandem to produce complex social outcomes. Her experience, when viewed through the framework's dialectical lens, moves beyond a simple story of personal triumph to a nuanced analysis of the co-constitution of structure and agency.

First, her initial situation perfectly illustrates the workings of the "Dynamic Gendered Field." The director's explicit request for a "female face" to "make it more lively" is a clear

manifestation of the field's gendered logic, where women are often pre-assigned roles based on stereotyped attributes that align with a patriarchal worldview (Creedon, 1994). Her feeling of being a "fraud" while suppressing her analytical insights demonstrates the powerful disciplinary force of the field (Foucault, 1990). This is not overt coercion, but a subtle form of power that produces a compliant subject through the internalization of industry norms. The initial valuation of her appearance over her knowledge is a classic example of how symbolic capital is unequally distributed and recognized. Within this field, her analytical knowledge, a form of cultural capital, was initially rendered inert because it did not align with the field's gendered expectations of her role (Bourdieu, 1984).

Second, her journey vividly embodies the complex process of "Agentic Identity Construction." Her shift was not a single act of outright rebellion but a calculated, incremental process of negotiation. The moment she began analyzing audience feedback for opportunities represents a crucial act of agentic reframing. She consciously re-evaluated "emotional labor"—a traditionally feminized and often devalued form of work—not as a constraint, but as a potential form of undervalued capital. Her subsequent actions—meticulously preparing emotionally resonant questions and crafting a unique "human story" interview style—are textbook examples of Butlerian performativity (Butler, 2011). This was a strategic performance with a dual function: on one level, it appeared to comply with the expectation for feminine "relatability"; on another, it was a form of micro-resistance. By professionalizing emotion and elevating it to a high-level skill, she subtly subverted the field's rigid dichotomy between masculine analysis and feminine emotion. She proved that empathy could be a tool for deep journalistic inquiry, not just a decorative trait.

The concept of capital conversion is central here. Xiao Hong astutely converted the "emotional labor" expected of her into tangible social capital (audience trust and rapport) and, subsequently, into recognized symbolic capital (her reputation as a unique and valuable interviewer). This accumulated symbolic capital then granted her the legitimacy to perform acts that were previously unavailable to her, such as inserting her own analytical commentary. This illustrates the high-stakes nature of agency; her strategy was not without risk. An unsuccessful performance could have easily reinforced the very stereotypes she sought to transcend, trapping her permanently in the "emotional" role.

Finally, the outcome demonstrates the dialectical nature of the framework and the "Dynamic" aspect of the field. By successfully converting her capital and reconstructing her identity, Xiao Hong did more than just secure her own position. She incrementally reshaped the expectations within her immediate professional environment. Her success created a new, viable model of a female sportscaster, subtly altering the local "rules of the game." This feedback loop, where an individual's agentic identity work begins to reconfigure the distribution of symbolic capital and challenge the field's doxa, is the central mechanism our framework seeks to capture. Xiao Hong's case, therefore, is not just a personal story, but a microcosm of the continuous negotiation, risk-taking, and co-constitution of structure and agency in the contemporary media world.

Discussion and Implications

The framework and its application to the case of Xiao Hong offer several significant contributions to the scholarly understanding of gender, media, and professional identity. This section will discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the findings, as well as acknowledge the study's limitations and suggest directions for future research.

The Framework's Contribution to Theory

The primary theoretical contribution of this paper lies in the proposal and operationalization of the 'Dynamic Gendered Field and Agentic Identity Construction' framework. Its value lies in its capacity to move beyond the persistent structure-agency dichotomy that often characterizes studies of women in male-dominated professions. Rather than treating structure as a monolithic force and agency as heroic, individualistic resistance, the framework operationalizes a dialectical perspective. It demonstrates how structure (the gendered field), and agency (identity construction) are mutually constitutive. The field provides the "rules of the game" and the symbolic resources, while agents, through their strategic performances, both reproduce and subtly reconfigure those very rules and the value of those resources. This co-constitutive model offers a more nuanced and realistic analytical tool than models that treat structure and agency as separate, oppositional forces.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the "Dynamic" nature of the field is a critical intervention, particularly in the context of contemporary media. Traditional field analysis can sometimes present a static picture. By explicitly incorporating the impact of marketization, digitalization, and socio-cultural shifts, the framework is better equipped to analyze industries in flux. It acknowledges that new technologies and platforms can create fissures in established power structures, providing new avenues for agentic action, as seen in the rising influence of digital media personalities. This is especially relevant for non-Western contexts like China, where media systems are undergoing rapid and often contradictory transformations (Burgh, 2004). The framework, therefore, provides a more adaptable and contextually sensitive model for global media studies.

Practical and Industry Implications

Beyond its theoretical utility, this research offers several practical implications for media organizations, practitioners, and educators. For media managers and gatekeepers, the findings challenge a narrow, output-oriented definition of professional competence. Recognizing that skills like "emotional labor" and "community building" are not merely soft, feminine traits but are forms of valuable professional capital is crucial for fairer talent evaluation and retention. Organizations that create space for and reward diverse forms of professionalism are more likely to foster innovation and connect with broader audiences. This may involve rethinking hiring criteria, promotion pathways, and on-air role allocation to move beyond entrenched gender stereotypes.

For female practitioners themselves, Xiao Hong's narrative offers a powerful, albeit complex, model of strategic agency. It highlights the importance of self-reflexivity—consciously analyzing one's position within the field and strategically reframing perceived weaknesses into strengths. Her story underscores that agency is not always about overt confrontation but can involve sophisticated, performative navigation. This provides a more pragmatic and empowering narrative than one focused solely on insurmountable barriers. For media educators, this research underscores the need to prepare students not just with technical skills, but with a critical understanding of the gendered politics of the industry. Curricula should include discussions on symbolic capital, emotional labor, and strategies for career navigation to better equip the next generation of female media professionals.

Limitations and Future Research

This study, like all research, has its limitations. The primary limitation of this paper is its reliance on a single case illustration. While the case of Xiao Hong is rich and illustrative, its purpose is to

demonstrate the framework's application, not to make generalizable claims about all female sportscasters in China. The framework itself, while robust, requires further empirical testing across a larger and more diverse sample of participants.

These limitations point to several promising avenues for future research. First, a larger-scale qualitative study could explore how agentic strategies vary across different types of media organizations (e.g., state vs. commercial media), different sports (e.g., football vs. tennis), and different stages of a career. Second, quantitative research could be designed to measure audience perceptions of different performative styles, testing the hypotheses about emotional labor and perceived credibility on a larger scale. Finally, comparative research applying this framework to female professionals in other male-dominated fields (such as finance or tech) or in different cultural contexts would be invaluable for testing and refining its broader applicability. Such future work will continue to build upon the central insight of this paper: that the construction of professional identity is a dynamic, contested, and deeply meaningful process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has proposed, elucidated, and demonstrated the "Dynamic Gendered Field and Agentic Identity Construction" framework as a robust analytical tool for interrogating the professional lives of women in male-dominated media industries. By moving beyond a simplistic structure-agency dichotomy, the framework provides a more nuanced and dialectical perspective, revealing professional identity not as a fixed attribute but as an ongoing, performative, and strategic project. The case of "Xiao Hong" vividly illustrates this process, showing how an individual can navigate pervasive structural constraints not merely through overt opposition, but through the subtle, intelligent, and agentic reframing of roles and conversion of capital.

The central argument of this paper is that to fully comprehend the experiences of female sportscasters in a rapidly changing context like China, we must attune our scholarly attention to the intricate interplay between the forces that seek to define them and their own powerful practices of self-definition. The framework presented here is offered as a step in that direction. It underscores that while the gendered field sets the stage, it is the agents themselves who, through their everyday acts of compliance, resistance, and creativity, write the script of their professional becoming. Ultimately, this research calls for a perspective that recognizes both the profound challenges and the equally profound resilience of women in media, contributing to a more complete, empowering, and ultimately more accurate understanding of gender politics in the contemporary world. This holistic view is not only academically necessary but also essential for fostering a more equitable and inclusive future for the industry.

Disclosure statement
The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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