

Female Faculty in Journalism Education in Nigeria: Implications for the Status of Women in the Society

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Abstract

This paper addresses gender issues in the training of journalists in Nigeria. Recognizing the power of the media in influencing decisions and attitudes in society, it criticizes the absence of women teachers in Nigerian institutes of mass communication and schools of journalism and argues that this has further marginalized the Nigerian woman in a society that is predominantly male-dominated. The paper suggests that if more women became trainers of journalists they would influence their students in their perceptions of the role of women in society. This would in turn have a multiplier effect as their students join the media and help change the image of women in society.

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La Faculté Féminine dans l'Éducation Journalistique au Nigéria: Implications pour le Statut des Femmes au Nigéria

Résumé

Ce document se penche sur le problème de l'appartenance sexuelle dans la formation des journalistes au Nigéria. Reconnaisant le pouvoir des médias dans l'influence de la prise de décisions et de l'attitude de la société, il critique l'absence des professeurs féminins dans les instituts nigériens de communication de masses et dans les écoles du journalisme, et soutient que cela a contribué à marginaliser la femme nigérienne dans une société dominée par les males.

L'article laisse entendre que si plus de femmes devenaient enseignantes de journalisme, elles pourraient influencer leurs étudiants dans leur perception du rôle des femmes dans la société. D'après l'auteur, cela aurait un effet multiplicateur quand les étudiants à leur tour rejoindraient les médias, étant donné qu'ils contribueraient à changer l'image de la femme dans la société.

Introduction

On 8 March 1991 Amnesty International published a 15-page document about human rights' violations against women. It was said to be the most comprehensive report ever done on the subject, covering more than forty countries . . . Do you remember having read an article on this amnesty report, or watching a television programme, or hearing from radio about it? From all we know, the media coverage was minimal, yet it (the report) dealt with horrendous crimes inflicted on women daily around the world . . . All of which underlies the fact that we live in a world of patriarchal power structures . . . The reigning male values are also enshrined in the conventional criteria for news. They determine the category of persons whose voice may be heard in public, while disqualifying others (Traber and Lee, 1991, p. 1).

That women constitute the majority of the category of persons whose voice may not be heard in public is a well-known fact. The marginalization of women is a feature of both developed and developing societies (Gallagher, 1985). But though the status of women is poor in the developed world, it is so poor in the developing countries that it can only be described as wretched. In Nigeria, for instance, a combination of cultural and religious factors has reduced women to mere appendages of their male counterparts. A number of years after the United Nations Decade for Women ended in 1985 the realities of Nigerian life have continued to ensure that, even though women make up a large percentage of the population, their representation in national affairs has remained insignificant, particularly in the area of politics. Not a single woman has been appointed a member of the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC), the highest policy-making body in the country; none of the governors and administrators in the 30 states of the federation is a woman.

Certain solutions have been proffered for this problem, some of which are constructive, like the recent establishment of the National Commission for Women; others are downright condescending, such as the suggestion that the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB)¹ should lower admission cut-off marks for women to increase the number of women admitted into Nigerian universities. JAMB rejected that suggestion, even though it agreed that fewer women were entering the universities yearly (Nnadi, 1988). It is sad that women education at the tertiary level should be declining at a time when women are in dire need of good education to bolster the efforts to improve their status. The implication is that women will find it even more difficult to aspire to decision-making positions when they lack higher education. In addition, women will not aspire to participate in the construction of knowledge in the universities and other tertiary institutions, when they fail to step on the first rung of the ladder that leads to faculty membership.

Although the number of female lecturers in Nigerian universities and polytechnics has witnessed a general increase in recent times, there are still areas of higher education where male dominance could in the long run militate against the efforts to achieve a better status for Nigerian women. One of these areas is the education of journalists — the provision of the workforce whose duty it is to construct images of the world for vast media audiences, including images of women, and shape public attitudes on

various issues.

Current trends in journalism recruitment in Nigeria indicate that the Nigerian journalist of the future will have passed through a tertiary institution to acquire the minimum of a diploma in mass communication/journalism as stipulated by the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ). The proliferation of journalism 'schools' in the country, despite the negative influences which this proliferation could generate (Akinfeleye, 1987; Okunna, 1987), has already provided many centres where formal journalism education can be acquired at the tertiary level. In every one of these centres, the education of journalists is dominated by men. Formal education is not merely the imparting of knowledge and skills to learners. An educator imparts, wittingly or unwittingly, also his or her attitudes, values and prejudices to students who, even in tertiary institutions, consider teachers as role models. The question is, as gatekeepers and agenda-setters for classroom discussions, how much attention are male lecturers giving to issues that concern women and their coverage by the media? Considering the androcentric (male-centred) nature of the Nigerian Society, and the power of the mass media to reflect and reinforce certain characteristic national traits, could the issue of the trivialization and stereo-typing of women in the Nigerian mass media not have its roots in the male-dominated education being given to students in the nation's centres of journalism education?

Theoretical Background

The Social Categories Approach to the study of mass media audiences recognizes that the male members of a society make up a social category whose sub-culture has its own norms, values and attitudes (Defleur and Ball-Rockeach, 1975). Culture serves as a filter or screen through which ideas, methods, knowledge and skills are introduced into a group or society, and an educator's knowledge and skills undoubtedly reach his or her students through this type of filter.

This filtration continues through the processes of gate-keeping and agenda-setting which characterize all types of communication — interpersonal or mass — and control the information that reaches the audience. The central hypothesis of the agenda theory is that an audience member exposed to a given medium agenda will adjust his or her perception of issues in the direction corresponding with the amount and type of attention devoted to those issues in the medium used (McLeod *et. al.*, 1974). Consequently, any issue which is under-represented in the medium or source becomes labelled as unimportant and is accepted as such by the audience. Other theoretical formulations (Bandura's social learning theory and Gerbner's cultivation hypothesis) support the expectation that perceptions of social reality by an audience will correspond closely to the 'realities' portrayed in the medium or source of information, because the images of the world portrayed by the medium/source will be internalized and accepted as accurate representations of reality by the audience (Bandura, 1977; Gerbner *et. al.*, 1986). This influence of a source/medium on people's social realities depends on the extent of their dependence on that medium — the influence will be greatest

when dependence on the medium is high.

Female Faculty in Journalism Education in Nigeria

There are over 40 'schools' of journalism/mass communication in Nigeria. A good number of these are departments of mass communication in universities and polytechnics. In all these 'schools', faculty members are predominantly male. In the majority of these schools, there are no women at all teaching mass communication courses. A look at the data in Table 1 on staff composition in some of the departments of mass communication shows the dearth of female faculty members at both the university and polytechnic levels. (Since these data were gathered at the end of 1988, there has been little change in the situation).

Table 1: *Staff Composition in Departments of Mass Communication*

Institution	Academic Staff*		
	Total	Male	Female
University of Lagos	15	14	1
University of Nigeria, Nsukka	12	11	1
Bayero University, Kano	12	12	-
University of Maiduguri	12	12	-
Anambra State University of Technology (Enugu)	5	4	1
University of Jos	4	3	1
Federal Polytechnic, Bida	9	8	1
Anambra State Polytechnic, Oko	9	9	-
Auchi Polytechnic	8	8	-
Institute of Management and Technology (Enugu)	6	5	1
Total	92	86	6

**Data as at end of 1988*

Even at the premier schools of mass communication in the country, the involvement of women in the construction of the knowledge which shapes media content is equally marginal. The University of Nigeria is premier in the sense that journalism studies in Nigeria first started there in 1961. This school of mass communication now offers courses up to masters degree level. Another 'first' is the Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) where mass communication education at the polytechnic level first began in 1978. The University of Lagos Department of Mass Communication is also premier in more ways than one. One of the foremost schools of mass communication in the continent, this department is the first and only one at which mass communication is studied up to the doctorate level.

In the newer schools of mass communication such as the one at the Anambra Polytechnic at Oko and the Kaduna Polytechnic, as well as other government institutions not mentioned in this paper, the teaching of mass communication is equally a male-dominated exercise; the ratio of male lecturers to female lecturers is 15:1 or worse. At the private 'schools' of mass communication, many of which are already characterized by poor staffing, the presence of women among the teaching staff is practically non-existent.

Implications of a Male-dominated Education for Nigeria Journalists

In every society, public attitudes regarding the role of women in society are major factors in deciding the status of women. In shaping these attitudes, the media exert a strong influence (Macbride *et. al.*, 1981). The images of women in mass media content — news, entertainment, advertising etc. — is thus seen by media experts as a crucially important topic because this image will undoubtedly be reflected in the attitudes of the society towards women in the long run (Sandman *et. al.*, 1976). Given the trend in journalism education in Nigeria, there is a strong possibility that as students graduate, the sum total of the learning they acquire from the male-dominated teaching in the nation's schools of mass communication will predispose them to selecting and reporting events and issues to reflect a male ordering of priorities, even when some of the reporters are themselves women. This type of androcentric view in the media content is a major factor in deciding the status of women in the society, particularly through a reinforcement of androcentric attitudes already prevalent in the Nigeria society.

In Nigeria, both the larger society and the male sub-culture see women and women's aspirations as unquestionably subordinate, and the marginalization, trivialization and stereotyping of women are incontrovertible aspects of Nigerian life. It is in a society like this that a male porter could tell a woman, who has paid him to carry her shopping to *her car*, that no matter what she is, she is inferior to him because she is 'just a woman'². In Nigeria, the male members of the society are effectively socialized into the norms of their social category and those of the society as a whole. This socialization begins very early in life and is so effective that male chauvinistic attitudes towards women appear inborn, and are often displayed unconsciously, irrespective of the educational background of the men. It is here that policy makers limit the number of children a woman can have to four, when a man can marry as many as four wives and keep as many concubines and mistresses as his ego dictates, each of them a potential mother of four children! Considering this background, notwithstanding other societies where they might have acquired their degrees, mass communication lecturers in Nigeria are probably victims of bias against women. This bias, largely *unwitting*, apparently filters into the lecturers' relationships with their students in both formal and informal interactions, and covertly influences the knowledge and skills imparted to these students.

Journalism Education and Agenda-Setting

It could be argued that the agenda-setting function of the mass media in a society could have its beginnings in a mass communication classroom. Those issues which the media do not include in their agenda may turn out to be the very issues that were either not mentioned at all, or whose importance was played down during the education of the journalists who now make up the workforce of the media establishments. The influence of the agenda-setting function of the mass media is aptly summarized by McLeod and his colleagues (1974). In this era of acute shortage of mass communication text books in Nigeria, students are often constrained to depend solely on classroom lectures as a medium of information. In the course of this writer's interviews with students,³ lecturers were consistently ranked highest as a source of information, above other sources like colleagues and textbooks; in many cases, lecturers were the sole source of information. What a lecturer says or does not say on any issue in mass communication, therefore, becomes really important. Lecturers also play the role of gate-keepers, deciding what kind of information on the selected issues will pass through their 'gates' to their students.

As a female lecturer in mass communication, this writer has been astounded over the years by the ignorance of her students concerning media coverage of women and the issues being raised about this and related topics, particularly in the developed parts of the world. Take, for example, the images of women which are presented by the mass media: 'The efficient housewife', 'caring wife and mother', 'wise manager of household budget', 'elegant beauty', 'modern superwoman organizing a "double-day" . . .' (Gallagher, 1985). How many Nigerian male lecturers point out to their students that these images are stereotyped (women could do important work outside the home and still be considered 'normal'), and are becoming increasingly challenged and corrected in different societies and in their mass media? The media in Nigeria are still filled with these and other stereotypes of women. The female lecturer in a mass communication department is apparently a lone voice in including these issues on the agenda for student education. Her students have little or no access to books and journals in which such problems are discussed and her male colleagues have not helped matters.

Over the years, research has shown that the prevalence of women stereotypes in the mass media can be damaging to the status of women in the society (King and Stott, 1977; Gallagher, 1981). By 1978, Tuchman and others had called the mass media portrayal of women a 'symbolic annihilation of women' which could be brought about by trivialization or the absence of women in media content (Tuchman *et. al.*, 1978). Thus, if the mass media in a society trivialize or marginalize women and their issues, this portrayal of women could well have its roots in the formal education/training given to the media practitioners. It has been noted with regard to communicating the status of women that 'in terms of content, it is not simply what the media say, or how they say it, that bolsters stereotypes, and limited or skewed perceptions of women. Equally important is what they do *not* say' (Gallagher, 1985). By the same token, what male lecturers say or do not say about women and media coverage of their

issues is crucial in shaping the content of the various media in which student-journalists will be employed on graduation. Interviews with mass communication students have shown that these issues of media portrayal of women are seldom included in lecturers' agenda for classroom discussions⁴. This agenda-setting influence underscores their role in determining which issues gain the students' attention, as they (lecturers) decide which items to discuss and how much prominence to give to each.

Journalism Education and Stereotyping

The stereotyping of women, which the mass media are guilty of, can also have its origin in a mass communication department dominated by androcentric tendencies. Consider a task as routine as that of the Head of Department (HOD) which constitutes supervision of an editorial board for one of the many training newspapers or magazines published by departments of mass communication in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The HOD sets up a 16-member editorial board, all male except the token one or two female students who are appointed as either society page editor and her assistant, or as entertainment editor and her assistant. In the department under consideration, the ratio of male to female students is not anywhere as wide as the 8:1 in the editorial board⁵. As a matter of fact, enrolment figures show that roughly equal numbers of male and female students are admitted into the country's mass communication schools (Emenyeonu, 1991). Even in the University of Maiduguri which is located in the far north, rated by some observers as a conservative area, the male-female student ratio is almost 50 - 50 (Domatob, 1988). From this simple action of the HOD performing his normal duties, the stereotyping of women journalists as being only fit for the soft and featury aspects of mass media work is already being inculcated in the student journalists. The veiled admonition here is that men play the strong and important roles, women the weak and unimportant ones. When the students join the workforce, women journalists, both as reporters and editors, are more likely to handle feature stories while hard news is made the exclusive province of their male counterparts.

The inferiority complex which this kind of division of labour breeds in media women could condition them to regard themselves as incapable of making any significant contributions to mass communication, thus causing those among them who are not very determined, to give up any effort to make an impact in their jobs. In the face of this kind of division of labour, it appears inevitable that the packaging of media content will be done to reflect a male perspective, thus giving rise to problems of sexism and gender bias in mass communication. In this type of situation, one guess is as good as another - what type of women will become newsmakers and what type of news will they make? In explaining gender bias, it has been noted that 'news is not one reporter's view of an event but a social, consensual product molded by a variety of . . . consideration. Thus it might be possible that journalists internalize popular perceptions and social stereotypes into their consensual definitions of what is news' (Turk, 1987, p. 2).

As these perceptions and stereotypes are perpetuated in Nigeria, it becomes doubtful that sexism and stereotyped presentations of women will soon disappear from the country's mass media content.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to draw the attention of media researchers, mass communication educators, and other individuals and groups concerned with the education of journalists to the possible consequences of the current trend in the formal education of journalists in Nigeria. From researchers, a positive reaction to the issues raised in this discussion should be the provision of empirical data on these issues. From male journalism educators in Nigeria, the attempt on their part is to guard against the witting or unwitting display of androcentrism in both formal and informal learning situations involving students.

It is common knowledge that when the majority of Nigerian men ever get round to talking about the emancipation of women, the talk is apt to be either derisive or paternalistic. Any woman who shows a concern for the problem of the continued wretchedness of the status of the Nigerian woman is likely to be labelled by her male counter-parts as a woman "libber", a word which women have classified as derogatory. Yet, this is a problem which has long been recognised in developed societies as requiring an urgent solution. The solution in those societies has included enforced government legislation against sex discrimination in employment and other areas of life (King and Stott, 1977). Because solutions like these are still rare in Nigeria, it becomes really important that those charged with the education of mass media professionals should be alert to the implications of any display of bias in the discharge of their duties. 'Unwitting' has been the key word used to describe the largely subtle and indirect male chauvinistic influence which male-dominated journalism education in Nigeria could have on professional news-gathering and reporting. No conspiracy theory is required to comprehend the causes of the marginal participation of women in journalism education in Nigeria. No deliberate efforts have been made to keep women out of mass communication lecture rooms as lecturers: women have apparently not made enough efforts to get into these rooms. During this writer's interviews with male mass communication lecturers, the reasons adduced for the dearth of female mass communication lecturers in Nigeria included the following:

1. Women are generally known for taking the easy way out and may not want to face the challenging rigours of academics.
2. Women as homemakers may not spare the time for academics.
3. The glamour of the electronic media attracts women more than chalk and board. Women who take a profession in mass communication prefer to work in TV and radio houses.
4. There are just not enough women in higher education in journalism. There is a lack of many female higher degree holders in mass communication. Only few

women take to the academic line by progressing up to M.A./M.Sc. or Ph.D levels in preparation for teaching/lecturing jobs in educational institutions.⁶

One thing common to all these views, apart from their being expressed by male mass communication lecturers, is that the blame for their failure to participate in the education of journalists is appropriately put on women themselves. Chauvinistic as some of these views are, the respondents' indictment cannot be faulted. Just as 'the absence of women on the AFRC did not allow for women's input in the making and formulation of some national policies thereby making it discriminatory against women' (Adefarasin, 1988)⁷, the absence of women in the faculties of centres of learning where the foundations for media coverage of women are laid, does not allow for women's input in the laying of these foundations. Nigerian women are marginalized from the political power centres of the society by being kept out of the AFRC by the male rulers of the land. Who is marginalizing women from the construction of the knowledge which determines the images and status of women in the society? Women. It has already been shown that a good number of mass communication students in the country's journalism/mass communication schools are women. A majority of these women apparently prefer careers in the mass media and have no desire to work as journalism educators on graduation. Out of a sample of 200 female mass communication students in the study by Emenyeonu (1991), only one respondent opted for a career in journalism education.

As the power of mass communication grows at the information and learning level, as the mass media grow in reinforcing dominant attitudes in a society, this marginal participation of women and the resultant male domination of the teaching of mass communication will, in the long run, determine the status of the Nigerian woman. As sex-role stereotyping in the wider society continues to socialize Nigerians to accept the status of women as inferior, the same sex-role stereotypes in learning situations involving student journalists, and in mass media content, could socialize even women to regard themselves as incapable of making significant contributions to society (Melton and Fowler, 1987).

Notes

1. JAMB is the national board responsible for examination and admission of candidates into tertiary institutions in Nigeria.
2. This writer witnessed this scene between a porter and a colleague.
3. Interviews conducted in 1987 and 1988 with mass communication students at the IMT Enugu, comprising National and Higher National Diploma (ND and HND) students. The IMT had the most prestigious mass communication school at the polytechnic level at that time, and students who had obtained the ND at virtually every polytechnic in the country clamoured for enrolment into the IMT HND programme. The views expressed by HND students in the interviews therefore included the analyses of the situations in many other polytechnics.

4. Same students as above.
5. This illustration is taken from the editorial board of *The Forum*, the training newspaper of the IMT Department of Mass Communication at the time of the study.
6. The interviews were conducted during the ACCE National Seminar in Jos, October 1987.
7. Mrs Hilda Adefarasin was the President of the National Council of Women Societies in Nigeria when she made this indictment.

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