Gender mainstreaming in journalism education

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Introduction
In a time of swift technological changes in the news media, much of journalism education is focused on preparing students for careers in a new media landscape instead of focusing on gender or other diversity issues. For example, Pavlik (2013, p.213) argued in a recent article that a curriculum that ‘emphasized innovation and digital media entrepreneurship is one of the keys to a robust professional future for the field and students seeking a media career’. Even so, Pavlik (2013, p.217) recognised that most programmes in media education are holding on to an outdated professional model of journalism and mass communication, which he described as ‘a nostalgic journey to the past’, and ‘a view aligned to the mostly white, male and gray-bearded titans of old-school media’. Pavlik (2013) did state, though, that entrepreneurial journalism education, as compared to traditional journalism education, provides the opportunity for more diversity in news content.

Concern about a singular focus on innovation and entrepreneurship in journalism education is not new. Ten years ago, Gutierrez (2000) wrote that media educators are more tuned into technological innovations in the curriculum than demographic diversity: ‘In short, while technological diversity is seen as an opportunity, demographic diversity is seen as a problem’ (Baldasty et al., 2003, p.19). According to Gutierrez, media corporations and journalism organisations are eager to invest money into technological changes, but ‘journalism educators have had to be pressured by advocacy groups, government agencies, and professional associations of gay/lesbian, women and journalists of color to deal’ with diversity in the curriculum (Baldasty et al., 2003, p.19).

There is no doubt, however, that journalism education should be more than an exercise in acquiring much-needed new technological skills. As pointed out by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) in their discussion of the elements of journalism, one expectation of journalists in a democracy is to give voice to the voiceless. Good journalism is inclusive and offers a variety of perspectives. And it seems that the place to start changing the news industry is by changing journalism education. Indeed, Josephhi (2009, p.47) described journalism education as an ‘agent of change’. Brown (2010, p.5) correctly wrote that ‘if we are going to transform gender relations in the media, we need to start with the journalists of tomorrow’. One of the most cutting edge ways to include gender into journalism itself and into journalism education is the approach of gender mainstreaming.

Gender mainstreaming
Gender mainstreaming, according to Morley (2007, p.609), is the ‘linguistic antithesis of gender marginalisation ... Over 100 countries worldwide have embraced GM in their state machineries. GM is a strategy that claims to make women’s and men’s experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes’. It is unclear exactly when and how the term gender mainstreaming was coined, but scholars agree that it came about through the work of the UN global women’s conferences. Unterhalter and North (2010) stated that the term originated in the 1980s as a result of the work of women’s groups during the UN Decade for Women (1976-1985), but True and Mintrom (2001) wrote that gender mainstreaming emerged in the early 1990s. Unterhalter and North (2010, p.389) explained:

The key idea was that women’s needs and interests were generally overlooked and made marginal in the development of economic and social policy, and that clear institutional strategies were needed to bring a realization of gender equality into the mainstream of social development, decision-making, and grassroots work.

A definition of gender mainstreaming that is often cited is one adopted by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Gender mainstreaming was defined as:

the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality (UN, 1997, p.28).

Similarly, Frankson (2000, p.24) defined gender mainstreaming as ‘integrating a gender equality perspective into all the mainstream activities of government, at the policy, programme and project levels’.

However, gender mainstreaming is also a contested concept and process. Daly (2005, p.433) argued that gender mainstreaming is ‘underdeveloped as a concept’. In a study of eight European countries, Daly (2005) found that gender mainstreaming was applied in different ways in different countries. Some argue that gender mainstreaming is in essence a liberal strategy of ‘adding women’, while others see it as a radical strategy for achieving gender equality that involves traditional state efforts to address gender imbalances by developing specific policies for women’ (True and Mintrom, 2001, p.33). A study by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) reported that ‘progress in implementing gender mainstreaming has been rather slow and ad hoc in practice, and issues of capacity and knowledge gaps remain largely unresolved across the EU’ (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2013, p.8). As such, it is still unclear whether gender mainstreaming as a strategy has been a failure, success or a combination of both (Tiessen, 2007).

Gender mainstreaming in journalism

The policy of gender mainstreaming has been applied to the practice of journalism, most notably by the Inter Press Service news agency. From 1994 to 1999, IPS launched and implemented a gender mainstreaming policy, which considered both organisational structure and news content (Made, 2000; Made and Samhungu, 2001). IPS examined gender roles and responsibilities within the organisation through an analysis of gender, age, position and salary of employees and seniority. IPS also carried out a gender-sensitive employment policy was created. News coverage focused on gender mainstreaming and the inclusion of a gender perspective. Made (2000, p.30) defined gender mainstreaming in this context as ‘integrating the concepts of gender, equality, and women’s rights into all our editorial coverage, and ensuring that these influence our news agenda’. The IPS Gender Policy (1998, p.1) stated the following:

IPS accepts that research shows undeniably that no news subject [topic] is gender free and that adequate discussion of any development issue and process must include a gender dimension ... IPS believes that the role of the media is to promote understanding of changes in the social, political, economic and cultural status quo in order to facilitate and support men’s and women’s equal participation in these processes.

Geertsema (2009, p.75) found in her study of the IPS gender mainstreaming project that its implementation was limited, but that it was ‘quite remarkable that any news organization, and in particular a global news agency, would make this attempt’.

Gender mainstreaming in journalism education

To mainstream gender in journalism, it seems logical that gender should be mainstreamed in journalism education first. The most prolific work in this field is done by Gender Links, a media and gender activism organisation based in Johannesburg, South Africa (see Geertsema, 2010 for a study of Gender Links).

Gender Links has applied the concepts of gender mainstreaming not only to journalism, but also to journalism education. Morna and Shilongo (2004, p.133) wrote that ‘[i]nformed media training is essential to remove gender biases that prevail... The challenge... is to integrate gender awareness training into all types and levels of media training’. In 2010, Gender Links completed a study in Southern Africa called ‘Gender in Media Education: An Audit of Gender in Journalism & Media Education and Training’, with the final report written by Patricia A. Made. This report clearly sets out what gender mainstreaming in journalism education would look like.

The Gender in Media Education (GIME) research study conducted 25 institutions in 13 countries from October 2009 to April 2010. Key findings included that only a few institutions have policies to achieve gender equality, males make up the majority of academic staff while females make up the majority of students, gender remains largely absent from curricula, attention to gender topics depends on the knowledge of individual instructors, gender was missing from course materials and gender was also missing from assessments of student and faculty work. As for research on gender, media and diversity issues, the report stated that...
these topics have ‘not become an area of serious academic research and scholarship’ (Made, 2010, p.13).

Made (2010) also reported on a mainstreaming project that Gender Links and the Department of Media Technology at the Polytechnic of Namibia (PON) in Namibia implemented from 2001 to 2004. Made (2010, p.71) concluded while ‘there is still strong gender awareness and gender champions at PON, gender is not systematically mainstreamed in the curriculum’. This shows the challenge of implementing gender mainstreaming in media education.

In fact, in most parts of the world gender mainstreaming is not required and remains unknown in journalism education. In Latin America, for example, there is no formal policy on gender mainstreaming in journalism education. Feminist scholars and activists, however, do offer general training in gender and media in Mexico, for example through the National Council for Gender Equality in Media. In the United States, gender mainstreaming is mostly an unknown in journalism education. A search of the database of Journalism and Mass Communication Educator, the premier US publication for all things related to journalism education, shows no articles on gender mainstreaming. That, however, does not mean that similar ideas have not been considered. For years, the Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, Florida, offered a course titled ‘Diversity Across the Curriculum’. In the course, participants were shown how to incorporate issues of diversity into all courses of a journalism curriculum, what can in essence be called the mainstreaming of diversity issues.

**Conclusion**

While gender mainstreaming is seen as the ‘most “modern” approach to gender equality’ (Daly, 2005, p.433) in gender and development circles, its implementation in journalism education and elsewhere is still a work in progress. In fact, except for the Department of Media Technology at the Polytechnic of Namibia, not much information is available about the implementation of gender mainstreaming in journalism education. The concepts behind gender mainstreaming may, however, be fruitful in future projects to incorporate gender and diversity issues more fully into journalism education.

**References**


