

Gender Mainstreaming at the University at the University of Botswana: A Content Analysis of UB Newsletter

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Abstract

The state of Botswana and the University of Botswana have made avowed commitments to gender equity. The former has done so by signing up for and implementing various protocols aimed at enforcing gender justice and the latter by mainstreaming gender in its various processes activities and operations. The main focus of this study is to find out if this commitment to gender mainstreaming is reflected in the University's house journal - UB Newsletter. This is because of the media's ability to influence the public agenda by focusing audience attention on particular issues, thus guaranteeing the salience of such issues in the minds of audience members. The study universe was the content of the newsletter over a six year period – 2000 - 2005. Content categories were academic, non-academic/social, appointment, and interviews. The study examined physical units, involving examination of the space devoted to activities and achievements of members of staff. The findings indicated that male members of staff dominated in all the content categories in the editions of the publication analyzed, thus giving the erroneous impression that the University of Botswana is a man's world. Flowing from these findings, the study recommends that the Public Affairs Department engage in gender-aware reporting in order to redress the situation.

Introduction

To live in a world that is equitable and fair, a continuous examination of institutions and practices should throw up failings and issues worth reexamining and restructuring to give everyone a sense of self worth and dignity. At one time, and it is sad to note that this is continuing in some climes, discrimination was on the basis of ethnic origin, skin colour, religion, gender, among other factors. It seems that in the world we live in there are always differences that will always result in an "us" versus "them" situation. Sometimes the difference can be as inconsequential as the ability/inability to pronounce "Shibboleth" correctly because of some linguistic handicap, but the consequences would be no less tragic.¹ It may sound funny but ask the Tutsis and the Hutus what is/are the major difference(s) between them that precipitated the Rwandan Massacre. Equally hard to explain is the connection between the Danish

caricatures and Nigerian Moslems' murderous rage that resulted in torching of Churches or the murder of nuns in Indonesia following Pope Benedict's lecture on Islam which Moslems considered offensive.

Another Shibboleth that has become the focus of world attention is the issue of patriarchal ordering of things. There is no problem with being born as male or female but when gender construction of roles begins to impose a ceiling on one sex at the expense of the other, then there is a problem. Women have traditionally been at the receiving end of this social construction of gender which consigned them to the role of mothers and housewives. And if they must venture out of the home, they were channeled to the nurturing professions of nursing and teaching. Efforts at addressing inequities such as the Beijing conference and the Nairobi forward-looking strategies need not detain us here, but it seems that the more gender is examined in every area of human endeavour, the more inequities are likely to be thrown up and hopefully addressed.

To believe that a skewed gender outlook would give way easily is akin to living in a fool's paradise. This is because many have come to make sense of our world and their place in it through the dirty lens of unfair gender construction. Take occupation as an example, many get fulfillment based on their ability to interpret their jobs or enact gender in a way that they find satisfying (Leidner, 1997). So for men the danger involved, the physical exertion of the job makes it a manly occupation. That women can equally perform the same tasks is immaterial in this kind of gender enactment (109). And if you thought that only men in blue collar sectors are the culprits, you must think again. Even in the hallowed halls of the Ivory Tower the problem exists. Consider Francis Bacon's paradigm of a female earth dissected and mastered by a male investigator, Darwin's theory of sexual selection involving competition among powerful males for passive females and the use of labels such as "masterpiece", "master work", "seminal" and "feminine or weak rhyme" are examples of how deeply gender hierarchy is inscribed into the culture (Coulter, Eddington and Hedges, 1993:243-244).

Gender and Media

The media, which has become indispensable in today's world, is also a culprit in gender role stereotyping amongst other failings. Mulvey, for instance, argues that classic American films perpetuate this by giving the male stars the more interesting role and making women the subject of a dominant male gaze by emphasizing their "to - be - looked - at - ness" (MacDonald, 1995:27). Ward and Harrison (2005) do not have a problem with women being portrayed as mothers or sex objects. What they do have a problem with is when the portrayal does not change in programme after programme especially because of the role of the media

as agents of gender and sexual socialization (Ibid, 14). As regards advertising, which uses media vehicles, Akpabio and Oguntona (2005) question the continued portrayal of women as sex objects even in the face of the mark they have made in various areas of human endeavour.

Saito (2007) documents the effect that television viewing has on women from

traditionalizing women's role and privileging men's role in various areas of human endeavour, fostering viewpoints such as if women are married they should stay home, making women seem less important because they are less seen in the media compared to their male counterparts, casting women who work outside the home in traditional female occupations such as nurses, waitresses, secretaries and teachers to generally reinforcing gender roles.

While it is true that the influence the media exerts on attitude and behaviour is not entirely clear, it is apparent that it does have some effect. Newhagen (2000) notes that in spite of empirical support for minimal effects of the media, strong media effects viewpoints persist. Specifically, as regards gender-role stereotyping, frequent TV viewing has been shown by Kimball 1986, McGhee & Frueh 1980, Morgan 1987, Signorelli & Lears 1992, Zuckerman, Singer & Singer 1980 to have an effect on the holding of stereotypical views as regards masculine and feminine activities, traits and occupations (Ward and Harrison, 2005). In other words, the media by portraying women narrowly is actually doing a great disservice to their acceptance beyond the narrow confines to which they have been traditionally limited. In addition, it limits the aspirations of girls towards entering professions and callings that have not been traditionally associated with women.

While it is true that the media reach a wide audience, there is another category of publications that serve a public relations, rather than a purely journalistic purpose. While journalism thrives on the reportage of the negative with a fixation on crime, sex, and other scandals, house journals or newsletters serve the purpose, like every tool in public relations, of building goodwill and a favourable image for the organization that produces and circulates them. Usually every attempt is made to project organizational and individual achievements as well as milestones and to give all stakeholders a sense of belonging and foster in them identification with the corporate vision and mission (Akpabio, 2005). This is done through the various items and columns in the publication, such as the cover page, editor's foreword, feature articles, news stories, photographs, social diary, humour, and miscellaneous items (Akpabio, 2005).

University of Botswana and commitment to gender equity

Any examination of gender and its various manifestations must start with an examination of the wider context of gender mainstreaming, the political will of the state of Botswana to right the wrongs of the past and the commitment of the University to gender equity. Gender mainstreaming involves integration of gender equality into all aspects of an organization's operation (Van den Berg, 2001). In other words, appointment, career progression, perquisites, and other organizational processes should not be skewed in favour of any gender. It means equal access to material resources, opportunities, and benefits as well as participation in decision-making and the putting in place of a value system based on equality (Ibid, 7).

This becomes especially important in the light of the findings in the Media and Gender Handbook.² Even though women constitute fifty-five percent of the population of Southern Africa, their representation in Parliament comes down to a paltry eighteen percent. And this number is more than the percentage of female lawmakers in Europe and the United States! When one looks at the media specifically, the findings are not inspiring either. The Gender and Media baseline study conducted by Gender Links³ indicates that women constitute seventeen per cent of news sources in the region and women are more likely to be identified according to family relation--as a wife, mother, or daughter--in the news, clearly indicating media bias.

Botswana has demonstrated the political will to carry through on gender equity. According to Chilisa, Tsheko and Mogegeh (2002), the state has adopted the African Platform for Action (1994), the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action (1995), as well as the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development (1997) and its addendum: Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and Children (1998). Botswana has also ratified international instruments including the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1997). They also report that the Botswana government promulgated the National Policy on Women and Development (1996) and partnered with development agencies and Civil Society Organizations to produce the Gender Programme Framework (1998), the Review of Laws Affecting the Status of Women in Botswana (1998), a Study on the Socio-Economic Impact of Violence Against Women (1999) and the Gender Advocacy and Mobilization Strategy (1999).

The University of Botswana for its part has given formal recognition to gender and development issues. In an opening address at a workshop on "Sharing Information on Women and Gender Issues"⁴ the former Vice Chancellor, Professor Sharon Siverts detailed some of the achievements of the University in this connection. In 1992, the

University instituted the Gender Policy and Programme Committee (GPPC) which has subcommittees in all University faculties and the library. She also mentioned that the research unit, NIR, has a gender research coordinator, the University library has a wide collection of materials on the subject and the institution has produced some of the country's finest gender activists. She explained that the GPPC was set up to "promote gender awareness, gender sensitivity and gender equity in all plans and programmes of the University and strengthen its role in facilitating the empowerment of women and men in development"⁵

The critical question that follows from all these is: is the University living up to its avowed commitment to gender equality in all aspects of its operations and activities? The rest of the paper will examine the UB Newsletter from a gender lens with a view to finding out if there is gender equity in the treatment of members of staff.

Methodology

Since the study involves examining the University of Botswana's commitment to gender equity through the stories carried in the UB Newsletter, content analysis lends itself better to this kind of study. Barelson defines content analysis as the "objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Deacon, Pickering, Golding and Murdock 1999, 115). The manifest content of this study is the news stories on academic and non-academic staff of the University. The study universe involves copies of UB Newsletter over a six year period (2000 – 2005). The study adopted physical units which involve counting space devoted to content (Frey, Botan and Kreps 2000).

The content categories involve academic distinctions, non-academic and social events, appointments, and interviews involving staff while the unit of analysis was the gender of staff members. Falling under the category of academic were, for example, stories such as inaugural lectures, publications of research findings and books, attendance and presentation of papers at academic conferences. The non-academic and social event category included send-off parties and donations to charitable causes. The appointments category referred to reports on career progression, appointment of staff members as heads of faculty, departments, and units, while the category of interviews comprised interviews conducted by a correspondent of the publication with academic and non-academic staff. Activities of staff members in the normal course of their duties such as the Vice Chancellor receiving guests or attending functions were not included in this study.

The researcher did the coding by himself as the need for coders did not arise especially since the use of physical units involve standardized

measurement unlike referential, syntactical, propositional and thematic units which fall under the category of meaning units involving symbolic meaning (Krey, Botan and Kreps 2000). Data obtained were analysed using simple percentages.

Findings

Gender-related stories in the editions of UB newsletter under examination were as follows: 2000 – 13 stories; 2001 - 16 stories; 2002 – 23 stories; 2003 – 12 stories; 2004 and 2005 – 39 stories each, thus making a total of 142 stories. See table 1.

Table 1: Gender Related Stories in UB Newsletter

Year	No. & percentage of stories
2000	13 (9.2%)
2001	16 (11.3%)
2002	23 (16.2%)
2003	12 (8.5%)
2004	39 (27.5%)
2005	39 (27.5%)
Total	142 (100%)

In terms of yearly distribution of stories on the basis of gender, there were consistently more stories about men as opposed to stories concerning women in all the years under study. In all the 142 stories under examination, male members of staff were mentioned 158 times, thus constituting 74.5%, while their female counterparts were mentioned 53 times (25.1%).

Table 2: Gendered Distribution of Stories by Year

Year	No. & percentage of Stories		Total
	Male	Female	
2000	21(77.7%)	06 (22.2)	27 (100%)
2001	18 (75%)	06 (25%)	24 (100%)
2002	19(61.3%)	12 (38.7%)	31 (100%)
2003	22(66.7%)	11 (33.3%)	33 (100%)
2004	44 (80%)	11 (20%)	55 (100%)
2005	34 (83%)	07 (17.1)	41 (100%)
Total	158(74.5%)	53 (25.1%)	211 (100%)

In terms of the nature of the news stories carried in the editions of the newsletter, stories that related to academic distinctions, attendance at

conferences, inaugural lectures and other academic concerns constituted a clear majority at 56.9%. News stories announcing appointment of staff to various positions constituted 29.9%, followed by non-academic/social (9.95%) and interviews (3.32%).

Table 3: Types of Stories

Type of story	No. & percentage of stories
Academic	120 (56.9%)
Non- academic/Social	21 (9.95%)
Appointment	63 (29.9%)
Interviews	7 (3.32%)
Total	211 (100%)

When the story types were crossed with the gender of the individuals that constituted the subject of the stories, male members of staff dominated in all the categories. See table 4.

Table 4: Types of Stories by Gender

Type of story	No. & percentage of stories		Total
	Male	Female	
Academic	90 (75%)	30 (25%)	120 (100%)
Non-academic/Social	13 (61.9%)	08 (38.1%)	21 (100%)
Appointment	52 (82.5%)	11 (17.5%)	63 (100%)
Interviews	05 (71.4%)	02 (28.6%)	07 (100%)
Total	160 (75.8%)	51 (24.1%)	211 (100%)

Discussion of Findings

This study was interested in finding out if the avowed commitment of the University of Botswana to gender justice was played out in the content of the official organ of the University – UB Newsletter. Of the 142 stories examined over a six-year period, involving 211 mention of members of staff, male staff members dominated the publication. This creates the impression that in terms of academic achievements, involvement in social activities, appointment to positions of responsibility as well as the expression of viewpoints, male members of staff are better off than their female counterparts. This is because one unintentional outcome of media portrayals is that they make individuals begin to think in terms of the images projected. As Cohen succinctly put it (in Hanson and Maxcy 1996:82), the press “is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.” Is it possible then that with the skewed emphasis of the newsletter, some individuals may get the impression that the University of Botswana is a man’s world?

The predominant portrayal of men as the exclusive achievers

is not doing justice to the cause of the women. Aspiring academics may get the impression that the academic rigor required to make a mark in one's calling is possessed only by males. This is because the newsletter is read by students and other members of staff. Female Staff Development Fellows may be discouraged from pursuing an academic career because there are not too many female role models to look up to if this coverage trend continues. This needs to change, especially since a regional study discovered that audience members, especially women, would like to see women in non-traditional roles as leaders, experts, business persons, and so on (Morna, Rama, and Muriungi 2005).

There were cases of individuals who got a tremendous amount of coverage in the newsletter. Professors P. K. Jain, E. M. Lungu, A. B. Oduaran, F. Youngman and S. Tlou's various achievements and honours filled the copies of the newsletter under study. In terms of the women, Professor Tlou stood out as a colossus in spite of the amount of space devoted to the men. News stories praising her achievements included headlines such as "Sheila, Research, Gender and HIV/AIDS: Five times an expert;"⁶ "Meet Professor Tlou: UB new HIV/AIDS coordinator;"⁵ "Professor Tlou honoured in Amsterdam: To deliver the fourth Anna Reynvaan lecture;"⁶ "Professor Sheila Tlou receives an international award;"⁹ "Outstanding African Nurse, Sheila Tlou delivers Virginia Henderson lecture at ICN conference;"¹⁰ and "Health Briefs by Sheila Tlou."¹¹

As the particular case of Professor Tlou demonstrates, it is not a deliberate policy of the University to discriminate against the female gender. It is important to understand the workings of the media, including an in-house publication like the UB Newsletter. To get media coverage one must actively court such coverage. The various processes and activities involved are in the realm of media relations. But in the particular case of the UB Newsletter, making the Public Affairs Department aware of one's achievements and awards should automatically guarantee coverage. This is because the newsletter, just like other publications within this genre, exists to trumpet organizational achievements with a view to getting positive publicity. So, if an individual within the organization chalks up a noteworthy achievement or using professional parlance – makes public relations news – it automatically gets into the house journal. The converse of this thinking informs the fixation of media gatekeepers with scandals and casualties.

However, based on the skewed coverage of the newsletter over the years, it is recommended that the Public Affairs Department assigns a staff member to cover achievements of female academic and non-academic staff in order to correct the unintended impression that the institution is a man's world. This would also provide credible role models

for students and younger academics/professionals, as well as correct the impression that women are underachievers in the University.

Rakow's (1986) observation about the direction of research on gender is quite relevant to our discussion. She notes that female scholars, realizing the skewed media portrayal of women, conducted studies that proved this and called for better images while ignoring the legal, economic, and social arrangements of the media. In other words, in tackling skewed media coverage, even in the context of the New World Information and Communication Order in which countries of the South were demanding more positive news coverage, the context of media operations does play a role. The structural constraints of the media in the indices of ownership, profitability, conglomeration, and integration exert a subtle influence on the news. A demand for better coverage that does not address the root cause of the problem is an exercise in futility.

But in the case of the UB newsletter, the findings of this study become especially important as it can be a starting point for redressing the skewed representation of women, especially as there is political will in this direction in the institution. The set up of the GPPC and the marvelous work the committee is doing indicates that the operating environment of the newsletter is conducive for the change this study recommends. However, the issue is that reporters and the managers of the publication may have been engaged in gender blind reporting. To positively address this, conscious efforts must be made to reflect the voices and achievements of female University of Botswana community members. This recommendation is in line with the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) gender policy, which calls for "giving voice to all members of the community" (Morna and Mufune, 2005:19).

Assigning female Department of Public Affairs staff members to this task may not necessarily be a solution. It has been difficult to find a correlation between the sex of a reporter and gender-sensitive reporting (Morna, Rama and Muriungi 2005). Regardless of the reporter's gender, the enculturation process in the media fosters skewed reporting. Akpabio's (2003:31) postulation about newspaper special project staff is relevant here in that they are inducted into a culture of "packaging" clients and they basically comply in order to remain relevant. In the same vein, female staff members may just perpetuate the same stereotypes because that is the way it has always been done. A reorientation of those involved in the publication becomes especially important. For instance, the integration of gender into the curriculum of the department of media technology at Polytechnic of Namibia was said to have helped the cause of gender diversity as well as advanced professional standards (Morna and Shilongo, 2005:3).

Conclusion

One incidental finding of this study is that when the content of the UB newsletter is examined from the perspective of projecting University of Botswana as a world class institution, the publication has done a marvelous job. However, when it comes to the critical question of University of Botswana living up to regional and international expectations on gender mainstreaming as well as in the context of the GPPC's mandate of promoting gender awareness, sensitivity, and equity, the newsletter fails woefully. Yet, all is not lost. From the findings of this study the department of public affairs needs to begin to redress this shortcoming by engaging in more robust gender-aware reporting. This will give greater visibility to women and create the impression that they are holding their own in the community, thus serving as role models for up and coming female academics. This is more so as the press (including the UB Newsletter) is quite successful in focusing people's thoughts on an issue (Severin and Tankard, 1997).

Endnotes

1. Judges 12: 6
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3. Gender and Media Baseline Study. Retrieved on May 22, 2008 from www.genderlnks.org.za
4. Opening address by the Vice Chancellor of the University of Botswana Professor Sharon Siverts at Workshop on Sharing Information on Women and Gender Issues 20th - 22nd April 1998 at the University of Botswana, Gaborone.
5. "UB holds first national conference on gender". Retrieved on October 10, 2006 from Google cache of <http://savuti.ub.bw/newsgenderconference.htm>
6. UB Newsletter January 2001, 6
7. UB Newsletter January 2002, 7
8. UB Newsletter June 2002, 6
9. UB Newsletter January 2003, 5
10. UB Newsletter July 2001, 8
11. UB Newsletter September 2002, 6
12. UB Newsletter March 2001, 5
13. UB Newsletter June 2001, 6
14. UB Newsletter February 2002, 8
15. UB Newsletter February 2003, 1
16. UB Newsletter March 2001, 5

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