

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

