

Gender and Journalism: A Perspective of Female Journalists in the Tamale Metropolis of Ghana

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Abstract: - This study investigated gender and journalism practice from the view point of female journalists based in the Tamale metropolis of the Northern Region of Ghana. The study which is qualitative in nature, adopted in-depth interviews, observation and focus group discussions as means of data collection. Findings indicate that Journalism in the region is male-dominated because many trained female Journalists either do not get employed in the profession, lose interest or shy away from practicing. The study observed that socio-cultural practices laced with sexual harassment were common hazards experienced by female Journalists. The need for personal and institutional strategies to deal with such phenomena was recommended.

Key words: Gender, Journalism, Perspectives and Female.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this contemporary world of work, gender issues play a critical role in every sphere of life and Journalism cannot be an exception. One cannot therefore rule out the role gender plays on a daily basis in the delivery of the news and the influences that underline the dictates of news and what does not, contrary to the belief that journalism is a masculine profession. “Despite the advances made by women in Journalism through the 1900s, Journalism as a field has remained male-dominated. An analysis of the logic of the field suggests, however, that masculinity and power are closely related to the ideas about what constitutes good Journalism that have prevailed in different periods” (Djerf-Pierre, 2007:99).

Boateng (2017), affirms that there is a strong hypothesis of the growing feminization of the Journalism profession in Ghana and that such a phenomenon is leading to a gradual erosion of the numerical strength of men in the Journalism profession. “It is also pertinent to point out that the progressive admission of women into Journalism education is not a deliberate institutional policy by the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) but a result of interventions by national and international development agencies aimed at achieving gender parity at all levels of education cycle” (Boateng, 2017).

Green, Jegadeesh and Tang (2009), conducted a study on gender and job performances and concluded that there was no dominant performance between men and women relative to other gender and suggested that there was no need for employers to discriminate in gender in their hiring decisions stressing that “Women have historically been underrepresented in many high-profile and lucrative careers.

Explanations for the low representation of women range from gender discrimination to differences in preferences and abilities. Many employers have instituted affirmative action programmes to encourage gender balance in hiring decisions”.

In the Swedish Journalism field, for instance, has an interesting phenomenon which has more often favoured male dominance. It is maintained that the intersections of politics, economics and professional field forces have in different time periods, influenced the dominance of men in Swedish society stressing that the heydays of party press activities favoured mainly male Journalists, some of who served as publicists. In the economic front, enhancement of economic power also opened the door in favour of masculinity.

“One might venture to conclude that by the gender logic of the field, the purpose of Journalism is linked to masculinity, but that ‘masculinity’ has been defined differently over time...nor professionalization necessarily favoured women”, (Djerf-Pierre, 2007:100).

The contradictory stands about gender in Journalism by scholars have generated interesting debates that seem unending globally. Some arguments put up suggest that the power relations that exist between men and women, master and subordinate and hegemony among others has created a gap in the practice of the profession. The narrative has often excluded women journalists in telling their own stories thereby widening the gap and this gap is what this paper seeks to address by telling the narrative from the perspective of the female Journalists. Their experiences in Journalism, the treatment of sources and the power relationship between male and female Journalists if it exists. The primary goal is to understand journalism from the standpoint of female Journalists.

This study is guided by some objectives which include firstly, to understand the roles assigned to male and female Journalists in the Northern region of Ghana, secondly, to investigate the dominant gender and its effects in the practice of Journalism and thirdly, to explore how sources treat female Journalists in the profession. The last objective is to understand how and why gender roles in the practice of Journalism in our society is necessary.

II. A BRIEF LITERATURE

A study conducted on Journalism and gender in the Finnish media industry suggested the need to adopt a multidimensional approach in studying the subject. Ruoho and Sinikka (2018), who carried out the research, interviewed management level workers who included eleven daily newspapers, six magazines and four television news and current affairs departments. The study was aimed at developing a model that allows Journalism to be studied from different perspectives.

“Instead of theoretically keeping Journalism and gender apart, we suggest that it is worth studying Journalism as a gendered institution with its own history, culture and social roles. We ask how the understanding of the relationship between Journalism and gender may change if different social, cultural and conventional dimensions of Journalism are examined” (Ruoho and Sinikka, 2018). They suggested the need for the subject to be studied as systematic and multidimensional objects that highlights various aspects of both concepts.

Anyidoho et al., (2016), in studying the roles, representations and perceptions of women in contemporary Ghanaian society affirm that patriarchy is the central system within which male authority is influenced in the social, political and economic organisations of society with women’s lives being marked by distinct patterns of disadvantages in different fronts. The study which adopted surveys, focus group discussions, observations and interviews indicated that Ghanaian women have made progress in many aspects of social life despite that they continue to lag behind men in educational attainment, income and employment status.

The study contends that fewer English Language produced films have themes emerging that suggest that women are independent and capable of successes in their rights but such movies attract smaller middle-class demographics thus leaving majority of the population to still consume content that legitimate longstanding stereotype. “In the media broadly, there are clear gendered trend...there are fewer female participants in media and producers of media content. Thematically, there are instances of progressive representation but also many examples of stereotyping, objectification and co-modification of women” (Anyidoho et al, 2016:37).

III. METHODOLOGY

The approach to this study is a qualitative approach, where focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and observations were used to collect data from selected female Journalists working in the Tamale Metropolis of the Northern region of Ghana. Yin (2011), describes qualitative study as the best method to be used in studying social phenomenon under real world conditions by representing the views and perspectives of participants. Qualitative approach seeks to study phenomenon in-depth to unearth detail data about the subject under study. In this circumstance, the sample represents a

group of professional Journalists and Media practitioners working in the same environment.

Inductive data analysis procedure as one of the features of qualitative data analysis was adopted to analyse the large volume of data collected. By using this procedure; patterns, categorisation of data and thematic analysis were used to interpret the data collected. As indicated by Creswell (2009), patterns, categorisations and themes are built from the bottom up through organising data into abstract units. This process demonstrates effective working relationship between the themes and database until a comprehensive set of themes are arrived at. This enables the researcher especially this researcher to make sense of the entire data collected since as responses were subjected to good analysis after inductive analysis without any bias or manipulation of any data.

Participants to this study were purposively selected from the population of Journalists and Media practitioners working in the Tamale metropolis of the Northern region. Respondents to this study have worked for not less than five years and have worth of knowledge and experience about the profession. A focus group consisting of five female Journalists was interviewed about their perspective on gender and journalism while the researcher adopted observation in the field to monitor certain social characteristics pertinent to this study. Yin (2011), articulates that when data is triangulated from different sources, it adds to the study’s credibility and trustworthiness.

Findings of this study were analysed along the research questions which flowed from the objectives of the study. Some themes emerged from the data and have dully been discussed thematically to make sense of the large volume of data collected. (NB: Your discussion fails to state how you settled on your respondents. What kind of sampling approach did you use? Purposive or what?)

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study analysed the findings thematically along the objectives of the research which investigated the subject of gender and Journalism from the perspective of the female’s point of view. The standpoint from which female Journalists operate their profession in the Northern region of Ghana is of paramount importance to this research.

Rq1. What Are The Roles Assigned To Female Journalists In The Northern Region Of Ghana?

There is absolutely no specific gender roles assigned to any gender. Roles are evenly distributed among all Journalists without regard to the gender of the reporter concerned. The daily activities of journalists comprises covering programmes in the metropolis and the region in general, conducting interviews and writing news stories, features and documentaries based on data gathered from the field. Since the programmes or events are general, reporters equally write on general issues without regard to their gender and subject. There are even some circumstances where only one reporter

corresponds for a media house based in Accra, the capital of the country and in such a case, that individual writes on virtually everything about the news in his/her territory hence gender has no place.

When asked about her daily activities, a Journalist in the Tamale metropolis narrates that; “My daily activities as a Journalist are planned towards getting at least two stories a day. I go for assignments if available or book appointment for an interview with my contacts. There are times these planned activities are truncated by breaking news and you have to drop everything and to chase after that story. My plan of stories range from news to features, documentaries for radio and television as well as online portal”. This simply has nothing to do with gender but everything to do with the role of a Journalist to society.

The work is demanding and always requires you to be chasing after stories and sometimes you get frustrated because of disappointments from sources, says a respondent stressing that the region is large and wide thus requiring daring Journalists to travel across the area and sometimes spending days in rural communities chasing after stories. This is a common practice by both males and female Journalists alike. Interpretatively, gender roles are insignificant here which further buttress the point that “women’s place is not the kitchen”.

Rq2. What Is The Dominant Gender Among The Journalists In The Northern Region And Why?

There is male-dominance in the Journalism profession in the Northern region of Ghana. “In the media broadly, there are clear gendered trends...there are fewer female participants in media and producers of media content. Thematically, there are instances of progressive representation but also many examples of stereotyping, objectification and co-modification of women” (Anyidoho et al, 2016:37). This is not different from the findings of this study as one respondent indicates, “Everywhere I go to cover a programme, I see more male Journalists than female Journalists and I turn to ask myself why because when I was in school at the Ghana Institute of Journalism (the premier Journalism training institute in Ghana), I saw more females in my class than I see in the field. It beats ones imagination why there should be fewer women in Journalism practice. Could it be deliberate or natural phenomenon that is intriguing to understand?

Findings from the female Journalists assigned reasons for the fewer women representation in Journalism in the Northern parts of the country. They complained of the nature of Journalism as a very demanding profession which is difficult, hence opts for public relations jobs where writing and other pressures are less but others genuinely do not get employment opportunities in Journalism. There are yet others especially the married ones who think because of their families, they cannot be in Journalism while others have peculiar reasons why they refuse to work in Journalism. Some of them feel Journalism is interesting when one has the skills adding that motivation from employers is also key to success.

Rq3. How Do Sources Treat You As Female Journalists?

The treatment meted out to Journalists by sources are reciprocal in nature. Sources treat female Journalists with respect and accept them for who they are. The reception is also determined by the behaviour portrayed by the female in question. There are some who complained of sexual harassment from their male sources while others attributed male sexual harassment problems to the door steps of some female Journalists who do not conduct themselves professionally.

Sexual harassments seems not to be a new phenomenon in Journalism. According to Chambers et al., (2004, as cited in Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009:123), female Journalists are usually harassed sexually when their sources are males, stressing that “most sources are people in power and most people in power are males...many women Journalists believe that manipulating their sexuality gives them an edge with their sources”. This study equally can confirm that indeed sexual harassment is not only common but being abusively by male sources. “Sexual harassment is very common in the Journalism profession. Just four days ago (17/06/19), I was interviewing a certain source considered to be respected person in society and he demanded to have sexual intimacy with me. This is someone I have been chasing for a long time to have an interview with but he has been tossing me until I managed to have him only for him to start harassing me”. These are the words of a worried female Journalist narrating her ordeal to this researcher.

To every problem, there is a solution. One female Journalist however has an antidote to such misguided attitudes as she indicates that diplomacy is the best method to address such problems since the need to continue maintaining rapport between a Journalist and a source is significant for the sustainability of the Journalist. “You have to be diplomatic in this profession otherwise men will always want to use you as a sexual object. I always use diplomatic strategies to free myself from the continuous verbal harassment from men”, explained the respondent. She sometimes give excuses as to why she cannot meet a source at certain places especially at nights since some places according to her are fertile grounds for sinister activities.

Gender Roles are unnecessary in Journalism

Many female Journalists are ambivalent to their sexuality when it comes to job performance. They indicate that their sex categorisation as females does not come to play at work. “I put my gender aside since I am determined to achieve my goal at my job. There is no taboo preventing me from working because I am a female, so I put out my best as I can. There is no obstacle preventing me from doing my job”, a respondent emphasised. This can find reason in Green, Jegadeesh and Tang (2009), study on gender and job performances that concluded that there was no dominance performance between men and women relative to other gender and suggested that

there was no need for employers to discriminate in gender when hiring.

To assert their stance, the female Journalists indicated that “traveling on dusty and rough roads across the Northern region to cover assignments sometimes is difficult and challenging though it is fun. It also gives me experience about how some people live their lives especially in the rural communities”. It is significant to note that pregnant female Journalists and married ones will find it difficult relating easily with the task of traveling long distances to cover events or hunt for stories. This becomes a hindrance to female Journalists in this category who per the nature of their condition would be restrained to partake in such exploits.

Sexual Harassment is Common in Journalism

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The journalist however has an antidote to such misguided attitudes as she indicates that diplomacy is the best method to address such problems since the need to continue maintaining rapport between a journalist and a source is significant. “You have to be diplomatic in this profession otherwise men will always want to use you as a sexual object. I always use diplomatic strategies to free myself from the continuous verbal harassment from men”, explains the respondent.

Another form of sexual harassment faced by female journalists come from their own male colleagues. Some of the respondents in a focus group discussion, admitted that there is also some form of sexual harassment on the part of their male colleague journalists who sometimes will hug and touch them amorously and when they complain, their male colleagues pretend to be playing with them stressing that “it hurts sometimes despite the fact that they mean no harm”.

Journalism is a Male Dominant Profession

There is male-dominance in the journalism profession. “In the media broadly, there are clear gendered trend...there are fewer female participants in media and producers of media content. Thematically, there are instances of progressive representation but also many examples of stereotyping,

objectification and commodification of women” (Anyidoho et al., 2016:37). This is not different from the findings of this study as one respondent indicates, “Everywhere I go to cover a programme, I see more male journalists than female journalists and I turn to ask myself why because when I was in school at the Ghana Institute of Journalism (the premier journalism training institute in Ghana), I saw more females in my class than I see in the field.

Apparently, the females have reasons to have fewer numbers in the profession. Many of them do not get into the profession because they feel the job is difficult and demanding hence opts for public relations jobs where writing and other pressures are less. Others genuinely do not get employment opportunities in journalism. There are yet others especially the married ones who think because of their families, they cannot be in journalism while others have peculiar reasons why they refuse to work in journalism. Some of them feel journalism is interesting when one has the skills and motivation to do noting that employer motivation is key.

Stereotyping in Journalism

The notion that certain jobs are preserves for the male gender has created stereotypical thinking among some people in society. An interviewee expressed worry why people turn to undermine the role play by female in society. She remarked, “People stereotype a lot in this profession. Some people do not understand why as a female I am able to do good stories and match the males boot for boot but I tell them that Journalism is about brain work, it is not a job that demands the use of our physical strength and therefore my gender does not prevent me from doing my job. Some males think because of sexual categorisation as females, we should not do competitive stories, this is what I refuse to accept”.

This thinking is what the proponents of the standpoint theory turn to question the unequal power relation in society. “Standpoint theory focuses on how the circumstances of an individual’s life affect how that individual understands and constructs a social world...the power that produce unequal social positionalities” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). Standpoint theory makes us to find reason for people or society to assigned roles to females because those roles are considered less valued. They argue that those unequal positions must be challenged.

Anyidoho et al., (2016) in studying the roles, representations and perceptions of women in contemporary Ghanaian society affirms that patriarchy is the central system within which male authority is influenced in the social, political and economic organisations of society with women’s lives being marked by distinct patterns of disadvantages in different fronts. This is no different in the face of the treatments being meted out to the female journalists in the Northern region of Ghana where they are sometimes prevented from entering places considered sacred. The proponents probably were reinforcing the patriarchal norms in such traditional areas.

Socio-Cultural factors Affect Female Journalists

The Northern region is predominantly a traditional settlement with social, cultural and religious taboos. These taboos according to the female Journalists sometimes sets a barrier to them because they are prevented from entering certain places. A female Journalists indicated that they are prevented from entering mosques and some traditional places. “I was prevented from entering certain parts of the palace during the performances of the YaNaa’s funeral in Yendi”.

Another interviewee indicated that entering the mosques where male worshipers are gathered is tabooed and therefore prevents them from gathering information whenever dignitaries pay visits to the mosques because they are left outside. Their only access to information from the mosque is through a third party which they frown upon. This sociocultural limitations to the practice of Journalism resonates with Maori’s Journalism in New Zealand. Hanusch(2013), indicates that Journalism in that country is greatly influenced by Maori cultural values such as showing respect to others, following cultural protocols and making use of culturally specific language.

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Gender is a double edge sword in the practice of Journalism in the Northern region of Ghana. It plays significant roles in how Journalism is practiced in some instances and in some circumstances hinders professionalism on the part of female Journalists. This study reveals that Journalism in this part of the country is a male-dominant with sexual harassment being a common phenomenon being experienced by the few female Journalists available. It can also confirm that despite some sociocultural factors rooted in patriarchy which affects objective practice of Journalism among female Journalists, they are competing actively with their male counterparts in an environment where stereotyping is gendered.

The need for media houses to put in place protective measures to protect their female reporters from sexual harassment should be paramount to media owners because the

phenomenon is disingenuous to the profession. Female Journalists must also be firm and principled to ward off sources who cannot control their lust and invoke the gender violence act when the need arises. The need to form association of female Journalists with an interest of protecting members must also be pursued while policies to make the environment safe and friendly to all sexes must be utmost concern of government and all stakeholders. Deliberate policies should be taken to whip up interest for more women to take up careers in Journalism so that more human interest and other hidden stories could be told for the benefit of society in general.

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