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The 5W's and 1 H
Gender Positive Sensitisation Guide
*(all the tips can be applied to other areas that need attention, such as
diversity, ethnicity, race, class, age)*

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WHO?

... should do it? You! You and everybody around you should embrace gender sensitive skills and practices. Remember: also be sensitive to other prejudices and biases against diversity, race, ethnicity, class and age.

WHAT?

... is it all about? It is about human rights. And... it is unconstitutional not to uphold human rights.

Where did the consciousness of human rights began? The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) dates back to 1948. Subsequently many others have been proclaimed. The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the UN in 1979. In 1995 the Beijing Declaration highlighted the issue. There were two strategic objectives for the media:

- To increase women's participation and access to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication
- To promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women and girls in the media; encourage gender-sensitive training for media professionals; and to take effective measures against pornography (Gender, 2002:7)

In our region and country we have various acts and bodies ensuring and enshrining rights, amongst which the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), the SADC's Declaration on Gender and Development and the Gender Commission.

On paper we have everything needed to enshrine human rights. By not complying and not "genderising" the media we are in fact violating the human rights of the majority of the world's population.

WHERE and WHEN?

... should it be done? These tips and techniques should be applied in every journalistic execution of a story, from the assignment, through the preparation (research), the interview, to the compilation and editing/packaging of the story. In other words, right from the newseditor's office, through to the place and time of the interview, with you in front of the computer writing your story and finally in the editing and packaging/lay-out of the story, including headlines and captions.

WHY?

... should I do this? A couple of quotes:

“In a world seen through the lens of the media, social and occupational roles are almost completely divided along gender lines. When women appear at all – and numerous studies around the world document their dramatic under-representation in almost all kind of media content – they tend to be depicted within the home and are rarely portrayed as rational, active or decisive” (Gallagher, 1995).

“Once and for all we need to commit ourselves to the concept that women’s rights are not factional or sectional privileges, bestowed on the few by the whim of the few. They are human rights. In a society in which the rights and potential of women are constrained, no man can be truly free. He may have power, but he will not have freedom” (Robinson, 2002:121).

“Mainstreaming gender in editorial coverage must be a management decision that has the full-backing of the gatekeepers in the newsroom” (Djokotoe 2002: 9)

The media is “one of the most powerful forces on earth for shaping the way we think” (Lowe Morna, 2002:10)

Yet, the media is all too often part of the problem, instead of part of the solution (Lowe Morna, 2002:10)

“More than at any time in history the character of the press is a key determinant shaping and defining national and global society” (Bollinger, 2003)

Remember:

Also apply these questions/techniques to other issues, such as Diversity, ethnicity/race, class and age.

HOW?

... should I do this?

You should

- “understand the attitudes, prejudices, biases and socialisation which often come through in media messages;
- recognise and analyse the imbalances of women’s voices, as compared to men’s in the media” (Gender, 2002:7).

Remember:

To mainstream gender in the media, you need to understand what gender is, and that there is a difference between sex and gender:

Sex: the biological differences between women and men

Gender: the socially constructed roles assigned to women and men.

Gender is not a “women’s issue”.

How can you “genderise” your own writing?

1. Ensure you understand gender and your own subconscious biases.
2. Also ask yourself these questions for each and every story:

Did you obtain balance by:

- ◆ Including more than one perspective or one voice in the story
- ◆ Including more than just the views of men, and the views of only men and women who are in positions of power or formal authority
- ◆ Seeking the “missing” voices
- ◆ Being conscious of language that reinforce stereotypes
- ◆ Tagging women and men according to traditional gender roles (Gender, 2002:19).

□ CHECKLIST OF KEY QUESTIONS

1. **Count the women and the subject areas in which they appear.** Are they evenly distributed, or is the balanced skewed?
2. **Women speaking.** Are they represented in a way that allows them to speak with dignity and authority? What is the sex of the spokesperson or voice of authority?
3. **Gender roles:** Are traditional gender roles reinforced – for example in relation to portrayal of family life or occupation outside the home – or avoided.
4. **Superwoman stereotype.** Are active, independent women represented as if they are ‘superwomen’?
5. **Natural woman stereotype.** Does the content reinforce the stereotype of women as innately docile, emotional, non-analytical, technically, inept, etc.6. **Sex-object stereotype.** Are women represented primarily as objects of male desire?
7. **The beauty myth.** What physical attributes apply to male and female participants – for example in relation to age, body weight, skin tone, clothes?
8. **Violence against women.** Does the material normalise violence? Does it suggest that women accept or enjoy violent treatment? How are female survivors of violence portrayed?
9. **Multi-dimensionality.** Does the representation encourage readers to understand women’s many dimensions in terms of personality, capabilities, tastes, preferences, etc?
10. **Diversity.** Does the material reflect the diversity of age groups, social classes, ethnic groups, physical characteristics of women and men in the community as a whole? (Gender, 2002: 31)

□ The Differentiation wheel

The “Differentiation Wheel” provides reporters with a better understanding of how they approach and depict their subject. It illustrates twelve basic conditions of differentiation that codify people and their experiences (Irby, 1999).

□ The diverse 5 W’s and 1 H

Diversity can be promoted by approaching the traditional components of a news report with a fresh perspective: the diverse 5 w's and 1 h:

WHO - is omitted from the story? // WHAT - is the context of the story? // WHERE - can we get more information? // WHEN - do we use gender or race classification? // WHY - do we include or exclude certain information (Colón, 1999) // And HOW - could the approach be different?

□ Building figurative bridges

This allows journalists to introduce diversity into their reporting. It involves a personal database of online sites and publications that focus on gender and diversity issues. Specialists, organisations representing minority groups and community role models, the unofficial leaders, must be included (Colón, 1999).

□ Mentorships

Most literature about mentorship suggests a one-sided relationship where the mentor trains the mentee. Mentoring someone of another racial group or gender is more difficult, because it is "unnatural". In these mentorships, the literature advises a two-way relationship where each party helps the other learn something that would otherwise have taken much longer to learn - if at all (Mentoring, 2000).

□ Lastly: question everything. Apart from the basic elements of good reporting (such as accuracy, balance, independence, clarity and conciseness of formulation, diversity of sources, contextual placement), you have to “sharpen the skill of ‘questioning the conventional wisdom’” (Gender, 2002: 57).

□ Also: Keep the debate about so-called hard news and soft news alive. Why the distinction? Were you given a “soft” news story because of your gender? How often does this happen? In other words: question newsroom practices.

□ More writing tips

Fairness and accuracy is a guarantee for gender-sensitive reporting – but this is not yet a given because of biases and prejudices. You should therefore be aware of your own “baggage and assumptions”.

When covering gender-specific crimes, the principles of good crime-reporting should apply: such as no imputations of blame towards the victim.

News journalism is about writing the story straight – without adjectives. Make sure news reporting about women is not riddled with adjectives and descriptions (as is the status quo in many such stories).

Build a source base of women contacts – and make this available to the whole newsroom.

If gender is not part of your organization’s ethical code, be a gender activist and ensure it is adapted (partly Williams, 2002: 38).

□ In writing, remind yourself that the packaging of the gathered material is the ultimate test. Here are some general tips:

- ◆ One way to get away from the “trap” of the male pronoun (which implies the “universal standard” – the given – is male) is to change to plural instead of the singular he or him.
- ◆ Secondly, seek alternatives for *man* in words (manpower; spokesman) and
- ◆ thirdly in sub-editing, look out for headlines and captions that can stereotype.

As a journalist you know the traditional role of the media is to inform, educate and entertain. With your “genderised” approach, you should enable yourself and others to inform, educate and entertain without perpetuating stereotypes.

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