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The gender ‘problem’ in Australian journalism education

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Abstract

This paper investigates if and how issues of gender are taught in undergraduate journalism courses in Australia. It examines published descriptions of undergraduate journalism degrees and majors in 30 Australian universities, providing a collective case study about the teaching of gender in journalism education. The research finds that no journalism program offers a unit that specifically addresses the portrayal of women in the media or, importantly, the gendered production of news and gendered newsroom culture. This paper posits the importance of gender education in journalism courses, hypothesises why it is ignored as a valuable part of journalism education, and suggests how tertiary journalism education could address systemic inequity for women in media organisations by adapting its curriculum.

Introduction

It is axiomatic to observe that there has been a massive transformation in the production, consumption and content of news media in the past decade, driven by dramatic technological advances. Newspapers in particular have had to respond to declining circulations and the shift of classified advertising to the internet, draining the once lucrative “rivers of gold”. The rise of citizen journalism and/or audience participation, accompanied by paradigm shifts in how news is consumed, has placed unprecedented pressures on news media and the journalists who provide the content. News media organisations are in flux and journalism education consequently finds itself in a similar situation, needing to adapt its curriculum to maintain relevance and respond to changing industry needs while not being hamstrung by its practical application. Journalism educators in Australia and around the globe adapt programs to reflect industry developments. The most recent assessment of tertiary journalism programs in Australia (Adams & Duffield, 2005), for example, suggests journalism education provides “diverse” and “flexible” programs, allowing inclusion of a broad range of topics (2005, p. 2). Adams and Duffield also maintain that each journalism program holds common objectives, such as news writing, media ethics or law, and online journalism. While this may be the case, there is little agreement about the core skills and knowledge domains that should be taught in university journalism programs (Henningham, 1994; Pearson, 1994; Flew & Sternberg, 1999; Green, 2005). O’Donnell (2006) notes that the pace of the “technological, commercial and cultural change in journalism” has complicated the design and delivery of journalism curriculum. Adams and Duffield suggest each journalism program “is
unique in the sense that it is constructed according to the beliefs, values, knowledges and experiences of the course developers” (2005, p. 5). This is a significant observation and underpins an issue which to date has received little attention in journalism education scholarship. In effect, Adams and Duffield argue that journalism educators teach what they know and what they are most comfortable with – politically and culturally. This paper pinpoints one “unique” educational issue that does not appear to fit with the beliefs, values, knowledges and experiences of journalism educators in Australia: the gendered production and content of news.

I have argued elsewhere (North, 2009a) that the absence of substantive education about gender issues and newsroom culture in university journalism courses helps maintain systemic gender inequality in the industry. The gendered newsroom called for further investigation into the extent to which gender issues – framed as an ethical consideration about content and production – are being made transparent in university journalism courses. “Gender issues” encompass more than content debates – the representation of gender in the media – although this is important. The gendered production of news has received very little attention in Australian journalism scholarship, but includes the status of women in newsrooms, promotional opportunities, pay inequality, gendered story allocations, a pervasive “blokey” culture in newsrooms (North, 2009b), sexual harassment (North, 2007), and consequently how female journalists survive or indeed thrive in these pressured environments.

This paper therefore aims to investigate if and how these gender issues are taught in journalism undergraduate courses. It examines published descriptions of undergraduate journalism courses in 30 Australian universities, providing a collective case study about the teaching of gender in journalism education. The paper begins with an overview of the rise of the female journalism student and the literature that accompanies it. It then explains and explores the data collected. What the research finds is disturbing: no Australian undergraduate journalism program offers a unit that specifically addresses the portrayal of women in the media, nor, importantly, the gendered production of news and gendered newsroom culture. A further analysis of unit synopses confirms that the concepts of “gender” or “feminism”, or indeed acknowledgment of the rise of women in the media and associated issues, are ignored in course content, leading to the argument that feminist or critical pedagogies are largely absent in journalism education in Australia.

It is often the case that issues of gender and race/ethnicity are examined together in feminist or critical scholarship, but this paper focuses on gender because of the clear gap in research, and because other scholars have investigated how issues of multiculturalism are employed in journalism programs in Australia (see, for example, Deuze, 2001). The paper hypothesises why there is such reticence to include gender issues in journalism education, or more simply why gender is absent in journalism education. It also considers why this is problematic for an industry undergoing significant change at every level of production and consumption. In an attempt to illuminate key issues for journalism educators in relation to gender, the paper suggests an outline for a unit that addresses gender issues in journalism education.

The rise of the female journalism student

There has been a steady increase in the number of female students undertaking journalism and/or communication degrees around the world in the past 35-40 years. In 1995, Margaret Gallagher found that women accounted for at least 50 per cent of the students in journalism and mass communication courses around the world (Gallagher, 1995, p. 5), varying from around 20 per cent in Iraq to nearly 80 per cent in New Zealand, Estonia, Hong Kong and Iceland. More specifically related to journalism, Bettina Peters (2001), citing a 1993 study, noted that the average percentage of female students undertaking journalism degrees was about 40 per cent worldwide. More recently, Golombisky (2002) and Densem (2006) confirmed that journalism classrooms
have become predominantly female. In the US, where journalism courses have a long history\(^2\), annual surveys of journalism and mass communications enrolments have shown increases in female students since the end of World War II (Becker, Vlad, Hugh & Daniels, 2002, cited in Densem, 2006) and a female majority undergraduate status since 1977 (Kosicki & Becker, 1998). A 2008 annual survey of journalism and mass communication enrolments reported that women made up 63.8 per cent of the enrolled US undergraduate students (Becker, Vlad & Olin, 2009, p. 233). Pearson (2009) notes that in Australia for the past 20 years, female journalism students have outnumbered males in Australia’s tertiary journalism courses. He cites Patching (1997), who found that females outnumbered males in a ratio between 2:1 and 4:1. Putnis and Axford (2002) also found that women dominate communication and media studies courses (also encompassing the specific discipline of journalism) in Australian universities, with female students taking up these courses at more than double the rate of male students. Their 1999 survey found there were 8726 female students enrolled, compared with 3597 males (Putnis & Axford, 2002, p. 2). Likewise, in New Zealand, research reveals that a disproportionate number of females to males applied to enter three of the country’s journalism courses, with ratios as high as nine females to each male (Densem, 2003). Densem (2006) later reported the gender ratio in New Zealand journalism courses at 7:1 in favour of women. This numerical dominance of female students provides much for us to ponder, including the interesting question of why male students appear to eschew journalism courses. This paper, however, draws upon these statistics for three reasons: to confirm the trend of female-dominated journalism courses worldwide; to use this data as a basis to question why journalism education ignores the majority of its students by failing to make transparent gender issues in newsrooms and in news content; and, to make the point that even with more than four decades of majority female presence in journalism education, this has made little change to the status of women in newsrooms around the world.

The irony in these figures is that this influx within academic institutions has not substantially changed the newsroom location of female journalists. Women are still employed \textit{en masse} in low-status, low-income positions, struggling to attain real influence in editorial decisionmaking roles. Women on average make up 38 per cent of journalists worldwide (Gallagher, 1995; Peters, 2001) and this figure has remained stable over the past 15 years (Len-Rios, Rodgers et al., 2005; Byerly, forthcoming). In Australia in the early 90s, Gallagher found that women on average made up 39 per cent of the media workforce (Gallagher, 1995, p. 12), including those in production and editorial positions, as well as administrative, technical and creative jobs in print and broadcast media. While there is a lack of current research on the status of women in Australia news organisations, a recent global study by the International Women’s Media Foundation (Byerly, forthcoming) demonstrates that women have not progressed in the news industry in Australia, either in news-gathering or decision-making roles\(^3\). Folker Hanusch’s (2008) research of Australian journalists within the “Worlds of Journalisms” project also supports the widely held notion that women’s participation in journalism, while previously increasing, is now slowing or static. He cites widely recognised research which notes that in 1992, 33 per cent of Australian journalists were female (Henningham, 1998); in 2000, 39 per cent were female (Brand & Pearson, 2001); and his 2008 project revealed a slight increase to 40 per cent (Hanusch, 2008, p. 101). Further supporting these statistics, the Australian section of the 2010 Global Media Monitoring Project report found that 32 per cent of 374 stories sampled from 26 Australian news organisations on a given day in November 2009 were written or presented by female reporters or newsreaders (Romano, 2010, p. 8). More importantly, women continue to struggle to make a numerical impact in editorial decision-making roles. A report by the International Federation of Journalists, based on research that surveyed industry unions in 39 countries, found that even though women represent more than a third of working journalists around the world, the percentage of women editors, heads of departments or media owners is only 0.6 per cent (Peters, 2001, p. 4). Gallagher’s (1995) study found that just 3 per cent of media organisations worldwide are headed by women. If the figures are broadened to take in the highest management level, women’s share of the jobs rises to 9 per cent (Gallagher,
More recently, Robinson (2008) reported that women constitute less than 1 per cent of editors and editors-in-chief in large and medium circulation American newspapers. A stark and ongoing example of gender inequity in editorial decisionmaking roles in Australia is made evident in a 2006 report, which showed that the nation’s 21 major metropolitan newspapers were all edited by men, with one exception being Jeni O’Dowd, who headed the weekly News Limited publication The Sunday Telegraph (MacLean, 2006, p. 17). In 2009 there were three female editors, all working on Sunday papers where soft, lifestyle stories proliferate; by April 2010 just two of those female Sunday newspaper editors remained.

**Research method**

This project employed a collective case study method (Stake, 2005, pp. 445-446) allowing for investigation into specific content absences in undergraduate journalism degrees and majors in Australia. The primary means of data collection is a content analysis of the publicly available course information published by Australian universities. Content analysis is a “blend of qualitative and quantitative positivistic and interpretative methods”, enabling researchers to make hypotheses about the data “via systematic coding and statistical analysis. Researchers then interpret the results in the light of historical and ethnographic information” (Bernard, 1995, p. 339). Content analysis also involves the identification of codes prior to searching for them in the data (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 192), and in this way is a deductive methodology. The method is considered to be objective because researchers make explicit how they have classified the content, and therefore it is in principle replicable (Gray, Williamson, Karp & Dalphin, 2007, p. 284). This project follows the principles of content analysis as noted by Kellehear (1993): develop categories prior to searching for them in the data, select the sample to be categorised, and count or systematically record the numbers of times the categories occur. Nevertheless, content analysis does risk missing the overall sense of a body of communications if we do no more than offer quantitative summaries of content (Gray, Williamson, Karp & Dalphin, 2007, p. 285). To avoid this problem, the paper draws on international literature to apply a theoretical lens to the data. In light of the gap in Australian literature on this issue, however, the paper hypothesises about the results. The final limitation with unobtrusive data collection is that there is no scope for obtaining an explanation of the data (Kellehear, 1993, p. 2). A larger study would enable face-to-face interviews with journalism educators.

**Data collection and assessment**

The data collection involved four stages. The first step of the project involved establishing how many Australian universities offered an undergraduate journalism degree or major in journalism. Postgraduate degrees were not considered in this project because the aim was to ascertain if gender is taught to prospective journalism graduates, the majority of whom complete a three-year degree. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website was searched on January 6, 2010, using the keywords “journalism”, then “media and communications”. That list was then cross-checked with those universities listed by Adams and Duffield (2005). A search of all courses provided by all Australian higher education providers (including non-universities) was completed by using the keyword “journalism”, resulting in 135 matches. Eliminating all postgraduate courses resulted in 81 course matches; eliminating all non-universities resulted in 78 course matches; eliminating all diplomas, certificates and double degrees gave a final figure of 15 universities offering 19 undergraduate degrees with “journalism” in the title. Those universities offering undergraduate degrees with journalism indicated in the title are:

- **Bond University**: Bachelor of Journalism;
- **Charles Sturt University**: Bachelor of Communication (Journalism);
• **Griffith University**: Bachelor of Journalism;
• **James Cook University**: Bachelor of Multimedia Journalism;
• **La Trobe University**: Bachelor of Journalism;
• **Monash University**: Bachelor of Journalism, Bachelor of Arts (Journalism);
• **Queensland University of Technology**: Bachelor of Journalism;
• **RMIT University**: Bachelor of Communication (Journalism);
• **University of the Sunshine Coast**: Bachelor of Journalism;
• **University of Canberra**: Bachelor of Journalism, Bachelor of Communication in Journalism;
• **University of Notre Dame Australia**: Bachelor of Arts (Politics and Journalism);
• **University of Queensland**: Bachelor of Journalism, Bachelor of Communication (Journalism);
• **University of South Australia**: Bachelor of Journalism;
• **University of Technology, Sydney**: Bachelor of Arts in Communication (Journalism);
• **University of Wollongong**: Bachelor of Journalism, Bachelor of Communications and Media Studies.

Step two involved broadening the search. The list above is not exhaustive as it does not include several well-known and well-established journalism courses, largely because these courses do not have the word “journalism” in their title and the search criteria simply did not pick them up. Adding the search term “media and communications” added a further 10 university courses that can be said to have journalism as a key component of a course which is offered with the intent of preparing graduates for a media or communications career:

• **University of Melbourne**: Bachelor of Arts (Media and Communications);
• **Swinburne University of Technology**: Bachelor of Arts (Media and Communications), Bachelor of Arts (Journalism) started 2010;
• **University of Sydney**: Bachelor of Arts (Media and Communications);
• **University of New England**: Bachelor of Media and Communications;
• **Australian Catholic University**: Bachelor of Media Communication;
• **Curtin University**: Bachelor of Arts (Journalism);
• **Deakin University**: Bachelor of Arts (Media and Communication);
• **Edith Cowan University**: Bachelor of Communications;
• **Macquarie University**: Bachelor of Arts (Media);
• **Murdoch University**: Bachelor of Communications (Journalism).

The third step involved identifying universities not picked up by the DEEWR website, but that appear in the Adams and Duffield list. These were cross-checked with the university websites and all five were found to still offer a journalism major:

• **Central Queensland University**: Bachelor of Arts;
• **University of Newcastle**: Bachelor of Communication (Journalism);
• **University of Tasmania**: Bachelor of Arts (Journalism, Media and Communications);
• **University of Western Sydney**: Bachelor of Communication (Journalism);
• **University of Southern Queensland**: Bachelor of Arts (Journalism), Bachelor of Communications (Journalism).
The search established that 30 of Australia’s 39 public and private universities offer an undergraduate journalism degree or major. This is five more than listed in the Adams and Duffield study (2005). However, this does not mean that five additional universities have come on stream with journalism in that time; in fact the Adams and Duffield study did not include some universities known to be offering a journalism major at that time. These include Swinburne University of Technology, University of Melbourne, University of New England, Australian Catholic University and Macquarie University.

Step four involved analysing which of the 30 Australian universities offering an undergraduate journalism degree or major included gender as a component of its course. The course outlines for each journalism degree or major were studied. This equated to 34 course outlines, as some universities offered two separate programs. For example, Swinburne University now offers a Bachelor of Arts (Media and Communications) and a Bachelor of Arts (Journalism); and Monash University a Bachelor of Journalism and a Bachelor of Arts (Journalism). The search was restricted to core units or units linked closely to the university’s media/journalism/communications major and not to other elective areas of study within the faculty. This eliminated Gender Studies or Sociology units linked to some media/journalism/communications majors as elective options. Using these criteria, journalism units in all electronic university handbooks were first judged by a simple search of whether the word “gender”, “feminism” or “women” featured in any of the unit titles. After checking the unit titles, each unit synopsis in the electronic handbooks and/or program websites was analysed for units that may include a gender or feminist component not immediately identifiable from the title. I acknowledge that, because detailed unit guides are not usually publically available, it is possible that some units which discuss gender issues could go undetected with this method. However, if gender is not mentioned in a unit synopsis in university handbooks, it is relatively safe to suggest that gender content does not exist, at least not in any significant way.

Results

Of the 30 Australian universities which offer journalism as an undergraduate degree or major, none includes a specific gender unit identifiable by the word “gender” or “feminism” or “women” in the title. An exception was the University of Tasmania, where I have previously established a unit entitled “Media and Gender”. This unit, however, has never been taught. Five universities noted some aspect of gender or feminism in journalism unit synopses in university handbooks or course outlines – Griffith, La Trobe and Macquarie universities, the University of Melbourne, and the University of Tasmania. All five references were in the context of media representations of gender, as opposed to gendered production processes or newsroom culture. Of the five, two occurred within core units at Griffith University (News Writing and Ethics) and La Trobe University (Constructing Communication). However, some of the references to gender in the five programs seem almost accidental, noted in unit synopses or learning outcomes but ignored in reading lists and lecture schedules. For example, Griffith University’s Bachelor of Journalism includes a second-year core unit entitled “News Writing and Ethics”. The “learning outcomes” listed in the 2009 and 2010 unit guides include: “An awareness of cross-cultural and gender related aspects of journalistic research and writing.” (News Writing and Ethics unit guide, 2010) The unit includes a focus on reporting Indigenous affairs (two lectures and an assessable “Indigenous affairs” news story), but there is no other reference to gender in the unit guide. The recommended readings include a strong Indigenous component, but no specific gender-related readings. Similarly, La Trobe University’s Bachelor of Journalism includes a first-year core unit, “Constructing Communication”, that aims to:

.... examine and critique the media using central concepts in media theory including ideology, intertextuality, semiotics, gender and ethnic representation, theories
of audience, globalisation, fandom and genre studies. (my italics, La Trobe University unit database, 2010a)

There are no specific gender-related texts in the recommended reading list, which is focused on textual analysis and media research methods.

The University of Melbourne’s Bachelor of Arts (Media and Communications) includes a second year unit entitled “Media and Communications Research”. The subject introduces students to media and communications theory: “Students will be presented with a range of case studies engaging with representations of gender and sexuality, class, race and ethnicity, and will investigate the pressures that contribute to patterns of media stereotyping.” (my italics, University of Melbourne handbook, 2010) However, the recommended texts do not contain any works specifically considering topics relating to issues of gender, and like La Trobe University, are focused on research methods and textual analysis.

Macquarie University’s Bachelor of Arts (Media) degree is a generalist media course in which students can choose units from a broad selection of topics, ranging from news and current affairs to cinema studies to interactive web design. Within this context, second-year students must select two units from 13 on offer as part of the BA (Media). Among the second-year units is a subject “Theories of Writing for the Media”, which “introduces students to some of the major theories and movements which have an impact on the way we write for the media, including feminism, structuralism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism” (my italics, Macquarie University Handbook, 2010). The guide indicates the feminist aspect of the unit includes a lecture, an assignment topic (one of three choices), and set feminist readings. However, this unit is ultimately one of 13 on offer to second-year students, who need choose only two. The University of Tasmania’s journalism program has one lecture among 13 relating to gender in its Media Ethics unit, although this unit is not a core unit in its Bachelor of Arts (Journalism, Media and Communications) degree. The unit also includes an assessment task that relates to representation of sexism: “Sexism, racism and ageism are still moral issues in the media today. Conduct a comparative analysis of ethical media practice by analysing three contemporary media texts and three texts from another decade” (Media Ethics unit guide, 2010).

It can therefore be deduced that no Australian university journalism degree or major currently offers a unit – either as a core unit or a closely linked elective – that contains a clear and significant gender or feminist component, and certainly none covers the gendered production of news or gendered newsroom culture. Rather, where gender is included, it is part of a broader media studies subject that primarily investigates the representation of gender. Griffith comes closest to considering gendered influences on the production of news insofar as it is the only university which includes in its unit outcomes “an awareness of the gender-related aspects of journalistic research and writing”; but, strangely, the unit guide does not include any further references to gender in its lecture schedule or reading list.

Why such reticence to include gender issues in journalism education?

A multi-layered response is solicited by this question, because it is clear there needs to be further research detailing the factors that influence journalism educators’ curriculum content resulting in a specific absence of gender issues. First, it is suggested that a significant number of journalism academics are not aware of, interested in, or educated about gender and journalism issues, making it impossible to develop a gender-aware curriculum. This is a point noted by Lizette Rabe (2004) in relation to South African journalism education. It is a poor reflection of journalism education in Australia in 2010 – with long-standing female dominated classrooms – that none
sees gender as an important educational issue. Second, if journalism academics are gender-aware, are they in a position to suggest units that address these issues? The backlash against anything to do with gender seems a strong enough force for gender to be dismissed. It is also true that students undertaking a journalism degree or major can undertake other Arts units, and they may address gender issues, but arguably it should be journalism educators who primarily address the specificities of gender and journalism.

A report mapping communication and media research in Australia suggests there is “no significant gender gap in the Australian media and communication academy” (Rahkonen, 2007, p. 39). A search of Australian journalism program webpages suggests there is indeed gender neutrality in the appointment of journalism teaching staff. Significantly, however, men still dominate as heads of journalism programs where key decisions about curriculum are made. A search in March 2010 found that 19 of the 30 journalism programs were headed by men and nine by women (it was unclear who led programs in two instances).

**Why should journalism programs include gender?**

It is problematic that gender issues – and in particular the specificities of the gendered production of news – are not taught in journalism programs. This lack of attention to gender fails to address the educational and experiential needs of both male and female journalism students. Journalism programs should make transparent obvious cultural and gendered aspects of professional practice and, should adapt curriculum content to address and challenge systemic gender inequity. I am not aware of any Australian research that explores what Australian journalism graduates think of the degree they earn, especially in relation to what they learn. Pearson’s (2009) preliminary report from a larger comparative research project comes closest, surveying Australian high school students about journalism as a career. A central component relates to gender and media issues and gendered comparisons in responses. A US study, however, may provide some basis for further thought. McAdams, Beasley and Zandberg (2004) investigated recent journalism graduates’ assessments of their journalism and mass communication education, asking how well they thought it prepared them for their careers. While the research covers many areas too broad to address in this paper, it is interesting to note the authors’ speculation that some reasons for these students giving journalism education a less than overwhelming endorsement may have been linked to respondents concerns about “age bias, gender bias and race discrimination while in journalism school” (McAdams, Beasley & Zandberg, 2004, p. 322). In the statistics gathered by this study, perceptions of gender bias rated the highest, especially among female respondents. Overall, McAdams, Beasley and Zandberg argued that the respondents’ comments showed a “necessity for journalism education to meet the needs of a largely female workforce that will be employed in a variety of settings” (2004, p. 327). They also point to a “passivity” in journalism education about gender issues:

> We suggest that the different perceptions of men and women toward their journalism education demonstrate that women students and graduates continue to struggle with cultural factors that work against them in their professional education and in the industry. (McAdams, Beasley & Zandberg, 2004, p. 327)

The authors appropriately argue that to serve the integrity of the journalism degree, educators need to serve the professions, as well as students, by making some constructive changes in approach and content.

I am hopeful that journalism education can adapt its curriculum and embrace equity issues in reporting and within newsrooms, enabling greater student awareness of the challenges of the industry’s “blokey culture” (North, 2009b). I am, however, reminded by Australian journalism scholar Mandy Oakham how difficult it can be to challenge this culture when trying to establish
a career in the industry. In her study of editorial cadet trainers, Oakham (2006) reveals what newsroom bosses want in their protégés: “One trainer explicitly states, ‘we are trying to create journalists in our own image, it is a chance to shape people’ and further ‘we try to influence them culturally’.” (in Oakham, 2006, p. 193) Oakham rightly questions the implications for innovation (in educating cadets) revealed by such comments, which suggest that “what has gone before” is always presented as best practice. One could sensibly ask that same question of our university journalism programs today in relation to gender issues. Perhaps, more specifically, the question must be asked: “what is ‘in our own image’”? A recent and damning unfair dismissal case between the male editor and editor-in-chief of one of Australia’s most popular News Limited tabloids, Melbourne’s *Herald Sun*, exposed this image as an entrenched “blokey” and “ego-driven” world (Hyland, 2010).

**A gender and journalism unit proposal**

So, to turn to some answers: a gender studies focus might bring new insights to established curricula in a journalism course, along with a range of benefits to students, and later the industry. At the very least, all undergraduate journalism programs should investigate a collaboratively taught gender and journalism unit that explores contemporary gender issues in the media, addressing both news content and production issues. Topics covered in such a unit could include: an overview of the rise of women in journalism historically and numerically both in Australia and internationally; an analysis of where women are located in newsrooms and the broader debate about the feminisation of the news and the allocation of (gendered) news stories; an examination of newsroom culture probing issues of power, masculinism and objectivity in journalism; and an investigation of the impact of feminism on news content and how gender makeup in newsrooms affects content. If such a unit formed part of a journalism degree program, potential journalists – male and female alike – would be better prepared to understand, negotiate and perhaps challenge gendered work practices. As it is, Australian journalism education is neglecting both its male and its majority female journalism students by not preparing them adequately for the newsrooms many will enter. As US scholar Golombisky notes:

> We should be preparing them [female students], in all their diversity, for entering the field as women. They need information and skills to recognize their worth and rights. We ought to be instilling in them a leadership mission to struggle for diversity and inclusion in their own fields as well as on behalf of the publics they serve. (2002, p. 55)

To find reasons why journalism education should embrace gender in its curriculum, one just has to ask why men dominate in the editorial hierarchy. Why is sexual harassment a continuing problem in the newsroom and effectively unaddressed by media organisations and the industry union? Why is there a disproportionate number of men graded higher than women of equivalent industry experience? And why are women more cynical about the industry? (North, 2009a)

**Conclusion**

The increased presence of women in newsrooms hasn’t encouraged the substantive changes in newwork practices that many scholars and journalists had predicted. More women in the industry is not enough to change systematically entrenched masculine privileges, and certainly it is not enough to have women located *en masse* in low-paid, low-status positions. As British television scholar Jane Arthurs suggests: “There need to be more women with a politicised understanding of the ways in which women’s subordination is currently reproduced, and with the will to change it.” (Arthurs, 1994, p. 100) It is not only women’s responsibility, however, to challenge gender
inequity in newsrooms or in news content; men must be included in the debate. One way to encourage men and women to have a politicised understanding of how gender works in newsrooms is for it to be taught in journalism programs at universities. Golombisky (2002, p. 61) notes that “tacking on a few women or women issues – deemed worthy of inclusion by traditional criteria – does not substantially alter the structure or content of white male-defined curriculum because events, ideas, practices, and individuals challenging dominant ideology are likely to be omitted”. But a dedicated gender and journalism unit in journalism programs potentially has great power. A gender unit is visible, it says “educators care about equity”, and “educators care that our male and female students are better educated about newsroom culture and gender equity issues that continue to undermine the industry and its content”.

The most significant hurdle to my call, however, is that many of those educators currently teaching journalism curriculum are not aware of, interested in, or informed about gender issues in relation to journalism production and media content. Nor do they have a good understanding of the breadth, history and importance of the scholarship. Therefore, a more significant call must be made to hire academic staff qualified to teach gender and diversity issues in journalism curriculum; decisionmakers should be prepared to lead in this area, even when industry might not be supportive. What journalism education needs is critically informed, academically astute educators who understand how issues of gender and power are implicated at every level of society – including in newsrooms and in the content journalists produce.

Notes


2. The University of Missouri journalism program was established in 1908 and is claimed to be the world’s first school of journalism (http://journalism.missouri.edu/about/history.html).

3. The IWMF has requested that the statistics not be revealed before the launch of its full report in March 2011.

4. Liz Deegan, Sunday Mail (Brisbane); Gay Alcorn, Sunday Age; Megan Lloyd, Sunday Mail (Adelaide).

5. Adams and Duffield (2005) studied 25 university journalism programs, selected from a list of tertiary institutions at the Australian Government’s Department of Education, Science and Training website accessed in 2005. “Keywords such as ‘undergraduate degree’, ‘Bachelor of Journalism’, ‘journalism’ and ‘journalism major’ were used to locate Bachelor degrees in Journalism or Bachelor degrees with a Journalism major.” (p. 7) The Australian Government’s Department of Education, Science and Training website accessed by Adams and Duffield was replaced on December 6, 2008, with the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) website.

6. Every unit guide for every unit of every journalism course was not studied, rather using professional judgment to eliminate those units which would not reasonably be expected to contain a gender component because of the practical focus, such as Radio Journalism, Broadcast Journalism, Online Writing, Feature Writing, and so on, and instead focused on broader units such as Introduction to Journalism, Ethics, News Writing, Media and Culture, Media and Society, Media, Politics and Society, and so on.
7. Monash University’s Bachelor of Arts (Journalism) program (taught by the author) does include a lecture entitled “Gendered news and newsrooms” in its Journalism Ethics unit, but the university handbook has yet to be updated to include the revised unit synopsis and its core status in the revised program. As well, a newly established unit, Gender, Race and Journalism, is to be taught from Semester 1, 2011 (see http://www.monash.edu.au/pubs/2011handbooks/units/ATS2895.html).

8. La Trobe University does offer an elective unit (one of eight students must choose as part of their journalism major) entitled Sex and the Media. The unit (not available in 2010) has a strong feminist component and considers “how gender and sexuality have been represented in the media and how these representations have been theorised” (La Trobe University database, 2010b).

References


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