

Gender and the University-Media Nexus

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INTRODUCTION.

This paper draws on a number of case studies to examine the issue of gender equality. I will look at two sectors that are particularly influential in shaping young people's perceptions of their position in society, with specific reference to changing attitudes and behaviours towards gender empowerment. Young people are especially important because they are most likely to have an impact on society in the long term. The two sectors are firstly, Higher Education (HE) and Universities and secondly, the Media. I will focus on 3 inter-related issues: firstly, the roles of these two sectors so as to illustrate how the organisational cultures of each sector operates; secondly, gender representation within Universities and the Media so as to establish whether women are represented at all levels in those organisations; and thirdly, the impact of those sectors on the issue of gender equality in society more generally.

Why Higher Education and the Media?

We need to ask why Universities and the Media are relevant to gender empowerment. Both sectors have important but different roles to play in gender equality. By the end of the 20th Century, there was a feeling, at least in industrialised societies, that the suffragettes and the universal suffrage movement had made huge strides in gender equality, starting with recognising the rights of women to vote in political elections and encouraging women to be educated and to work on an equal basis as men. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2016 records that "*...of the 142 countries covered by the Index both this year [2016] and last year [2015], 68 countries have increased their overall gender gap score compared to last year, while 74 have seen it decrease. It therefore has been an ambiguous year for global gender parity, with uneven progress at best...*"ⁱ But progress towards gender parity is being made and a good indicator of this is that the average worldwide gender parity index for females entering higher education has increased from parity in 1995 to almost 1.3 (56.5% female) in 2016ⁱⁱ and this reflects the trends in the UK (1.06 to 1.34) as well as Europe, North America and other richer nations^{iii iv} but also masks considerable variation. However, recent developments in the 21st Century have shown that much more needs to be done if women are to operate on an equal basis as men across the world. The #MeToo Campaign has highlighted the fact that the process of gender empowerment that has been ongoing for more than a century is far from complete and that there is still a need to change attitudes and behaviours in society if we are to achieve gender equality. And that is just in industrialised societies. What about in the rest of the world?

Do we need gender equality across the world?

Why is it important to have gender equality across the world? The United Nations has identified 17 sustainable development goals to be achieved by 2030^v. Goal number 5^{vi} is about promoting gender equality. The research evidence shows that gender inequality stunts economic growth and hinders economic development and that this is a problem at local, national and regional levels. To quote the OECD's 2012 Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship Report "*...in OECD countries, 50% of economic growth in the past 50 years can be attributed to girls having equal access to education*"^{vii}.

Gender Inequality.

So what does gender inequality look like? Gender inequality is an imbalance of power between men and women. At the two extremes: two thirds of the illiterate people in the world are women, while

less than 10% of world leaders are women. Abuse of women's rights exist in many societies. Physical abuse of women is more common than it is for men, although recent evidence highlighted by the media suggests that physical abuse of men is probably more widespread than we think. Women in almost every country work longer hours than men for less pay and a recent scandal in the UK about women in the media being paid far less than men for doing the same job has led to the government requiring all organisations above a certain size to declare the gender pay gap; the problem has always been that, because it is considered an invasion of privacy to ask what someone earns, it has been easy to hide the evidence - that debate is ongoing and is proving more difficult to solve than one would think. Finally, access to jobs is often controlled by males, and the Weinstein scandal in the film industry is just one example.

Gender Equality.

So what does gender equality look like? Gender equality means treating human beings equally irrespective of their gender. It means having an equal balance of power between the genders, with meaningful participation in economic and social decision making. It means having equal access to education, to job opportunities, to healthcare and to technology, with equal working conditions for equal pay and, having control over their own time, lives and bodies so as to maximise the potential of everyone for the good of society and the economy.

Gender Equality, Employment and the Law.

You would think that the law would ensure fair and equal opportunities when it comes to employment, but 150 countries have at least one law that treats women and men differently with respect to employment and 63 countries have five or more of these laws. Consequently, women in these countries are likely to encounter difficulties when it comes to owning property, opening bank accounts, starting businesses and entering certain professions.

Combating Harmful Social Norms.

Many countries have social norms that hinder gender equality. Laws against gender-based violence are not universal. The research evidence shows that 49 countries lack a law against domestic violence, 45 lack a law to address sexual harassment and 112 countries do not criminalise marital rape. Societal norms in many countries allow gender based physical and verbal abuse. Early marriage is widespread despite legal age limits. Women spend much more time on unpaid domestic or care work in every country.

Exceptions.

I am not going to answer the question of why gender inequality persists because it is too complex an issue, but much is explained by cultural differences and by people's behaviours within those cultural contexts. It is also the case that there are exceptions where women have risen to very senior positions, again for a variety of reasons; Indira Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto rose through their powerful political families; Golda Meir and Angela Merkel rose to power in very specific socio-political environments where women could compete equally; Hilary Clinton and Margaret Thatcher could shine as a result of their excellent education, which all of these other successful women also had. Mother Theresa was unusual because of her profound faith and beliefs.

ROLES of HIGHER EDUCATION and the MEDIA.

So lets look at the roles of organisations in Higher Education and the Media. Higher Education and the Media operate very differently: they are funded differently and they display very different kinds of behaviours, but both are important in forming opinions and changing attitudes of society.

Higher Education.

Universities educate very large numbers of young people at different stages in their lives, whether that is through undergraduate and postgraduate taught degree programmes to prepare students for work and life after graduation, through continuing professional development while they are in work, or through postgraduate research programmes. Crucially, university staff are expected to carry out high levels of research which in turn should inform their teaching so as to ensure that students are continuously exposed to the most cutting edge research findings. All university teaching should be based on evidence-based research. It often takes year to collect the data to carry out evidence-based research because it takes time to collect and analyse the data and to analyse it using rigorous research methodologies. This type of research requires significant funding which is very often from publicly-funded governmental sources, because it is rigorous and depends on such a high level of knowledge and analytical expertise. Objectivity and research methodology are important to avoid bias. The results of the research are usually disseminated through academic journals which are reviewed and edited by other expert academic researchers. The results can take some time to be published. Importantly, academics are promoted on the basis of their research excellence.

The Media.

The Media also influences very large numbers of young people through traditional print, traditional news media (radio and TV), film, video gaming and social media. By contrast with Universities, however, the Media reaches very large numbers of young people very quickly. It is designed to stimulate real-time discussion and debate on emerging issues as they arise, sometimes by people with very little expert knowledge of the topic in question, especially when it comes to social media. The media is not always free of bias and indeed often thrives on the most topical and sensational stories. The funding model is very different from that used for university research, normally being commercially driven to sell as many papers, air time or other media product as possible.

GENDER REPRESENTATION in HE and the MEDIA.

So are women and men are represented equally in Higher Education and the Media? I am going to give you a snapshot and summary of two different pieces of evidence-based research carried out on the representation of women in Universities and in the Media, so as to illustrate whether there are equal numbers of men and women in each sector, and whether they are treated equally and promoted equally? The two pieces of research were carried out by different research groups at different times. Although they are not directly comparable because of the research methodologies used, they both highlight issues of gender inequality within the two sectors of HE and the Media respectively.

The first case study concerns the ratios of male and female members of academic staff in higher education and draws on data from a network of university researchers working across 12 EU countries^{viii} examining whether women were being represented and promoted equally at all levels in Universities across Europe supported by statistical data from the EU^{ix xi} and and the UK's HESA^{xii} together with World Bank^{xiii xiv} and other data^{xv xvi xvii} to provide a worldwide context.

The second case study is the 'Global Media Monitoring Project' (GMMP)^{xviii} that reviews the way women are represented in the world's news media. The GMMP has produced a report every 5 years since 1995 and the 2015 GMMP was based on data collected from 114 countries. Among the key findings, GMMP 2015 reveals that the rate of progress towards media gender parity has almost ground to a halt over the past five years. The findings are broadly supported by other key studies such as the 'Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media' by the International Women's Media Foundation^{xix} and 'Women Make the News 2018' produced by UNESCO^{xx}.

Females in HE.

The proportion of women academics working in Universities across the world increased from 33.4% in 1990 to 41.0% in 2015. But the variation at the country level is more varied. For example, in 2015 the proportion of female Academic Staff was 57.4% in the Russian Federation, 49.1% in the United States, 41.6% in the European Union, 35.7% in the Middle East and North Africa and 23.3% in Sub-Saharan Africa^{xxi}. So, although there is a general trend towards greater gender equity over time there is still a great variation by country. Furthermore, there is great variation within countries by subject and by level of academic responsibility. The percentage of female academic staff was much higher in the Arts and Humanities than in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects; this has been widely recognised and there are several projects aimed at encouraging women to enter STEM disciplines, with varying degrees of success. The number of female academic staff was high at junior levels but decreased significantly in middle management, while it was low overall for female Professors. It is relatively difficult to leave research and to return to it successfully after any kind of break and some of the decline in female numbers would be as a direct result of taking maternity leave and then finding it difficult to maintain continuity of funding and the drive to continue carrying out research at a high level; some of the decrease in numbers was due to the fact that females often preferred teaching and counselling type duties rather than pure research; ironically, some of the decline was due to the fact that the few females who were successful were expected to be the female representative on numerous committees while some males did virtually no committee work and could focus on their research.

Interestingly, in some countries, the proportion of female Professors was higher than average. The data showed that there was a lower proportion of female Professors in Sweden and the UK compared to higher proportions of female Professors in the former Communist countries. Analysis suggested that the national priorities for society in each country drove the policies and subsequent legislation. In Sweden, for example, the legislation to protect maternity leave was very generous so that mothers could take several years out of work paid for by their employer; so women were incentivised to take time off and then to have another baby on the same generous terms and conditions. Not surprisingly, these females often experienced confidence and skills fade and rarely returned to the research domain as they felt unable to compete with males who had remained research active. From the point of view of society, this may be very positive, but from the point of view of gender empowerment, this situation makes it very difficult for women to re-enter employment on a competitive basis with men.

In ex-Communist countries, times were hard and everyone needed to work. The economies were not so healthy. The State provided free nurseries and women continued to work on a more or less equal basis as men very soon after giving birth. So mothers had less time out and were more likely to return to work, competing with men on research on an ongoing basis and so, they were more likely to reach the top of their profession in universities. These results illustrate the complexity of culture and socio-economic influences on gender equality and, how national policy and subsequent legislation to protect women may have unintended consequences for women in the workplace.

Females in the Media.

The second set of case studies concerns females in the media. The evidence showed that in the traditional media, men are statistically dominant, hold most of the power positions, are more likely to be quoted than women, are more likely to cover 'serious' topics, comprise 80% of experts and spokespeople, are the focus of 90% of news stories and tend to promote gender stereotypes. In the film and television industry, only 7% of directors are female, 13% of writers are female and 20% of producers are female. Young and attractive women are favoured, while older actresses have significant difficulties finding roles. Women are also paid on average, 2.5 times less than men in the

same jobs.

In much of the film and television industry, women have been objectified. The Western ideal of female beauty as being fit, young and increasingly thin, has spread throughout visual media; it has spread throughout films, fashion, adverts and print. Female roles tend to fall into cultural stereotypes and are often sexualised; in video games for example, 41% of women wore revealing or no clothing, whereas male characters were clothed. This objectification of women is transmitted through verbally through language, double meanings and humour, as well as non-verbally through imagery and it can be quite subtle.

Female roles in the media are also predominantly stereotypical, with women often being portrayed as housewives with ‘perfect’ lives, despite 40 to 90 % of women working outside the home over the last 50 years; men, by contrast, tend to be portrayed as professional decision-makers. Around 75% of female roles are about romance and the family, compared to only 18% of male roles that are portrayed in this way. Older female bodies tend to be portrayed negatively and cosmetic surgery is the norm in Western film; this is not the same for men. Women are often shown as sexual objects whereas men tend to be portrayed as sex-driven, aggressive and often, violent. Media gender roles are reinforcing gender stereotypes so that the stereotypes are being perceived as reality throughout society.

Impact of Social Media

The impact of social media is a relatively new phenomenon. Most people in the developed world cannot imagine life without it. Suddenly, everyone can have an opinion on everything; they can spread hate, love or support online^{xxii xxiii xxiv xxv}. Activists are using social media as a tool to spark debate and as an open forum to discuss all issues, ranging from political through to body image.^{xxvi} The psychological outcomes^{xxvii} can be extremely serious, with the ‘thin ideal’ resulting in low self-esteem, negative body image and increased psychological problems, including depression and suicide, while political radicalisation and child abuse spread through social media is also proving difficult to control.^{xxviii}

The #MeToo campaign.

The Harvey Weinstein scandal shook Hollywood in 2017^{xxix} and, as a result, the #MeToo campaign has spread across the world, with millions of retweets in days. Every country has its own version in different languages : #QuellaVoltaChe (*Italy*)^{xxx} – *that time when*; #IchAuch (*Germany*)^{xxxi} – *Me too*; #BalanceTonPorc (*France*)^{xxxii} – *Squeel on your pig*; and there are versions in Arabic and Chinese. A year on and it is no less pervasive. But has it changed anything or is to sensationalism designed to sell articles?

The #MeToo campaign^{xxxiii} has allowed women and men to feel safe sharing their stories. Discussion has spread online, across all media channels and you cannot ignore it because it is everywhere.^{xxxiv} It has enabled women to take control of abusive behaviour and to find closure if they have encountered sexual harassment.^{xxxv} There is a feeling that it has reduced the fear of losing their jobs or their reputation (or both) because they have come forward. The initial response from men was “*not all men*” or “*nobody I know has experienced sexual harassment*”.^{xxxvi} Quite quickly, however, the realisation has grown that by sheer numbers, yes, there is a problem; most women have experienced sexual harassment^{xxxvii}; they may deal with it in different ways, but they know men who have done it.^{xxxviii} New discussions such as #IdidThat and #HowIWill Change are being led by men who want to discuss, learn and apologise.^{xxxix xl xli} In a survey, 47% of men said they hadn’t discussed the #MeToo campaign with anyone, but 40% of young men say “The #MeToo campaign has changed the way I interact in potential romantic relationships and 35% have changed

their dating habits in response to the #MeToo movement. ^{xlii}

The #MeToo campaign has also led to the revelation that large numbers of men have also experienced harassment. Previously, they had no outlet to share their experiences. So women are not the only victims. ^{xliii xliiv} In schools, the #MeToo campaign has led to curriculum developments in order to keep children healthy, safe and prepared for life. ^{xlv xlvi} Over 300 actresses have set up the Time's Up Legal Defense Fund to support low-wage workers get support without losing their jobs. ^{xlvii} The number of rape, abuse and incest hotlines in the USA is up by 23% since 2016 ^{xlviii}. UNESCO has developed Gender Sensitive Indicators for the Media (GSIM) ^{xlix} and has set a goal is to have full gender equality in the media by 2030.

Legislation.

So where is the legal underpinning to control the negative aspects of social media? Interestingly, in the UK, the traditional media appears to be leading the way. The Telegraph has reported on the Westminster Dossier¹ which is a document containing actions against Members of Parliament (MPs) in which there are unverified accusations of sexual misconduct from #MeToo. In most countries the basic legal principle is that people are 'innocent until proved guilty', so these claims are potentially putting innocent people at risk ^{li}. In the USA, jobs have been lost because of these claims ^{lii liii liv} and there are cases where people have over-reacted towards their co-workers. Although #MeToo was initiated and disseminated through social media the consequences resonate much more widely throughout all workplace environments ^{lv lvi}. There has clearly been change but there are concerns that more needs to be done to ensure that social media acts responsibly to ensure essential freedoms whilst also limit the consequences of irresponsible communications.

Legislation of social media is under-developed. The UK government has just produced the 'Online Harms White Paper' as a joint proposal from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Home Office. ^{lvii} The White Paper suggests establishing an independent regulator that can write a 'code of practice' for social networks and internet companies; it considers giving a regulator enforcement powers including the ability to fine or block companies and internet sites if they fail to tackle 'online harms'; and it has proposed an independent watchdog that will write a 'code of practice' for tech companies. Senior managers could be held liable for breaches, with possible levies on the industry to fund the regulator. Critics say the plans threaten freedom of speech. Outlining the proposals, Culture Secretary Jeremy Wright said: "*The era of self-regulation for online companies is over*". ^{lviii}

Unfortunately, there is less support in emerging and developing countries where over two-thirds of the workforce are informal workers with limited or no job security. The importance of this is that since 82 per cent of world employment is located in the emerging and developing countries, the net result is that 93 per cent of the whole world's informal employment is insecure and inadequately protected. ^{lix} Moreover, online female campaigners everywhere have met with a significant backlash from those who criticise them for complaining without finding solutions ^{lx} or who, like Gilette ^{lxi} are accused of using the issue as a marketing opportunity. Society as a whole really needs to rethink its relationship with sex, which in itself is a huge task.

Media as a Change Agent.

The media has successfully spread discussion that was long overdue and is, therefore, an effective change agent. Social media was the perfect tool with which to tackle gender inequality as it is led by people rather than by the powerful few who have traditionally controlled the media. News websites are now following the trend and maintaining the discussion. People who do not feel safe in their jobs have somewhere to turn. The change is biggest in America but there is less support in

countries where most of the workforce has no job security. Social media, however, has resulted in some serious online harm which many countries are now starting to tackle through potential legislation.

SUMMARY

Gender equality is important locally, nationally and globally so as to maximise the potential of all people for the economy and society as a whole. Both Universities and the Media can change attitudes and behaviours towards gender inequality; the strength of the media, particularly social media, is that it can move very quickly to engage very large numbers of people; traditional media can then follow the trends and maintain the discussion. Universities also have a crucial role in addressing the issue of gender empowerment by influencing young people through their taught undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Universities also have a critical role in evaluating the impact of the media on gender empowerment through rigorous research but this takes a relatively long time to take effect. The organisational cultures, drivers and impact of the Higher Education and Media sectors are fundamentally very different, but by working more closely together, they can maximise their impact. The fact remains that much more evidence-based research is needed to understand the drivers and impact needed to achieve widespread gender empowerment.

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