



Handbook

Gender and Conflict Sensitive Journalism



Kvinna till Kvinna

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Peace journalism – how media reporting affects wars and conflicts (2013).
By: Pernilla Ahlsén.
English/Arabic/Bosnian.

**VI RAPPORTERAR OM
KVINNOR
I KRIG
OCH KONFLIKTER**

Vi rapporterar om kvinnor i krig och konflikt (2006).
A Kvinna till Kvinna report based on a review of news media in 76 countries regarding gender representation.
Only in Swedish.

Gender and Conflict Sensitive Journalism Handbook

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Where stories take place

“Were you raped during the war?” This question was asked by a foreign journalist to the Liberian peace activist Leymah Gbowee, who later received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011. When she said no, she was no longer of any interest.

Most of us are so accustomed to traditional media coverage of war and armed conflict, that we probably don't pay attention to how male dominated it is. Despite the fact that conflicts affect whole populations, women are almost invisible in the reports. If they are present at all, they are often seen crying in the background and are talked about – rather than listened to.

Men are often asked to explain and interpret the conflict in many different roles; as combatants, warlords, experts and politicians. Women, on the other hand, are rarely asked about their opinions regarding the conflict in general, and if they are, it is usually from a woman's or the victim's perspective.

However, media conflict coverage suffers from more than gender imbalance. People representing the civil society and people working for peace on grassroots level

are marginalized too. Traditional conflict reporting also has a strong focus on occasional violent events. It rarely explains the ongoing processes, backgrounds or contexts in which the events occur. How does this influence our understanding of the conflict? And what are the consequences of such reporting? This is where Gender and Conflict Sensitive Journalism comes in.

Gender and Conflict Sensitive Journalism can be described as a tool for journalists and others who strive to understand conflicts in a larger context. It has been developed from peace and conflict analyses which indicate that the choices journalists make when they are reporting about conflicts affect not only our understanding of the conflict – but also what we perceive to be the solution. This, in turn, affects the conflict and its outcome. It challenges the image of journalists as neutral and objective purveyors of information, and describes media's relationship with society as symbiotic.

Society's prevailing conventions and values influence the media – which in its turn influences society's values and shapes our behaviours through its coverage. This means that journalists covering conflicts will always be involved in

the events and processes on which they report.

Most conventional conflict reporting unwittingly fuels further violence. Gender and Conflict Sensitive Journalism aims to correct this bias as it challenges the media to keep analysing the prevailing conventions and values that govern their work. Why are certain sources considered more reliable than others? What alternative sources could contribute to a deeper understanding of the conflict? What news are excluded and why do we report on one thing and not the other? Are the facts presented really facts or actually claims?

Besides trying to explain what causes the conflict, gender and conflict sensitive journalists give voice to all perspectives – including nongovernmental organisations and people from all parts of civil society. They report on different efforts made to resolve the conflict and look closely at all sides.

In return, they are able to produce a more comprehensive report, and contribute to a more developed democracy with well-informed citizens that can make well thought out decisions – that could possibly bring about an end to the conflict.



Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/Ida Svedlund

Shinar's five headings

Professor Dov Shinar, Head of the Center for the Study of Conflict, War and Peace Coverage at Netanya Academic College, describes five headings under which peace journalism can be conceptualised.

1. Explores back-grounds and contexts of conflict formation, and presenting causes and options on every side so as to portray conflict in realistic terms, transparent to the audience.
2. Gives voice to the views of all rival parties, not merely the leaders of two antagonistic 'sides'.
3. Airs creative ideas, from any source, for conflict resolution, development, peacemaking and peacekeeping.
4. Exposes lies, cover up attempts and culprits on all sides, and revealing excesses committed by, and suffering inflicted on, peoples of all parties.
5. Pays attention to peace stories and post war developments (Shinar, 2007:200).

Reference:

Shinar, Dov, 'Peace Journalism: the state of the art'. In: W Kempf and D Shinar (eds), *Peace Journalism: the state of the art*. Berlin: Regener, 2007, pp. 199–210.

A 17-point plan for practical Conflict Sensitive Journalism

The following 17 points are practical suggestions for devising and applying such a strategy to rebalance the reporting of conflicts, countering the distorting influence of unexamined War Journalism.

AVOID

1. AVOID portraying a conflict as consisting of only two parties contesting the same goal(s). The logical outcome is for one to win and the other to lose.

2. AVOID accepting stark distinctions between 'self' and 'other'. These can be used to build the sense that another party is a 'threat' or 'beyond the pale' of civilised behaviour. Both are key justifications for violence.

3. AVOID treating a conflict as if it is only going on in the place and at the time that violence is occurring.

4. AVOID assessing the merits of a violent action or policy of violence in terms of its visible effects only.

INSTEAD

1. INSTEAD try to DISAGGREGATE the two parties into many smaller groups, with many needs and interests, pursuing many goals, opening up more creative potential for a range of outcomes. And ask yourself – who else is involved, and how?

2. INSTEAD seek the 'other' in the 'self' and vice versa. If a party is presenting itself as 'the goodies', ask questions about how different its behaviour really is to that it ascribes to the other – isn't it ashamed of itself?

3. INSTEAD try to trace the links and consequences for people in other places now and in the future. Ask:

- Who are all the people with a stake in the outcome?
- How do these stakeholders relate to each other?
- Who gains from the conflict?
- What are they doing to influence the conflict?
- What will happen if...?
- What lessons will people draw from watching these events unfold as part of a global audience? How will they enter the calculations of parties to future conflicts near and far?

4. INSTEAD try to find ways of reporting on the invisible effects, e.g. the long-term consequences of psychological damage and trauma, perhaps increasing the likelihood that those affected will be violent in future, either against other people or, as a group, against other groups or other countries.

AVOID

5. AVOID letting parties define themselves by simply quoting their leaders' restatements of familiar demands or positions.

6. AVOID concentrating always on what divides the parties, on the differences between what each say they want.

7. AVOID only reporting the violent acts and describing 'the horror'. If you exclude everything else, you suggest that the only explanation for violence is previous violence (revenge); the only remedy, more violence (coercion/punishment).

8. AVOID blaming someone for 'starting it'.

9. AVOID focusing exclusively on the suffering, fears and grievances of only one party. This divides the parties into 'villains' and 'victims' and suggests that coercing or punishing the villains represents a solution.

10. AVOID 'victimising' language like 'devastated', 'defenceless', 'pathetic', 'tragedy' which only tells us what has been done to and could be done for a group of people by others. This is disempowering and limits the options for change.

INSTEAD

5. INSTEAD enquire for yourself into goals, needs and interests:

- How are people on the ground affected by the conflict in everyday life?
- What do they want changed?
- Who else is speaking up for them besides their political leaders? Answers to this are often surprisingly accessible, as even many small grassroots organisations now have websites.
- Is the position stated by their leaders the only way or the best way to achieve the changes they want?
- This may help to empower parties to clarify their needs and interests and articulate their goals, making creative outcomes more likely.

6. INSTEAD try asking questions which may reveal areas of common ground, and leading your report with answers which suggest that at least some goals, needs and interests may be compatible, or shared.

7. INSTEAD show how people have been blocked and frustrated or deprived in everyday life as a way of explaining how the conditions for violence are being produced.

8. INSTEAD try looking at how shared problems and issues are leading to consequences which all the parties say they never intended.

9. INSTEAD treat as equally newsworthy the suffering, fears and grievances of all parties.

10. INSTEAD report on what has been done and could be done by the people. Don't just ask them how they feel; also ask them how they are coping and what they think. Can they suggest any solutions?

AVOID

11. AVOID the imprecise use of emotive words to describe what has happened to people, such as the following:

- ‘Genocide’ literally means the wiping-out of an entire people – in UN terminology today, the killing of more than half a million people.
- ‘Tragedy’ is a form of drama, originally Greek, in which someone’s fault or weakness ultimately proves his or her undoing.
- ‘Assassination’ is the murder of a head of state.
- ‘Massacre’ is the deliberate killing of people known to be unarmed and defenceless. Are we sure? Or do we not know? Might these people have died in battle?
- ‘Systematic’ – e.g. raping, or forcing people from their homes. Has it really been organised in a deliberate pattern, or have there been a number of unrelated, albeit extremely nasty, incidents?

12. AVOID demonising adjectives like ‘vicious’, ‘cruel’, ‘brutal’, ‘barbaric’. These always describe one party’s view of what another party has done. To use them puts the journalist on that side and helps to justify an escalation of violence.

13. AVOID demonising labels like ‘terrorist’, ‘extremist’, ‘fanatic’, ‘fundamentalist’. These are always given by ‘us’ to ‘them’. No one ever uses them to describe himself or herself. And they are difficult, if not impossible, to apply impartially in every instance where they would be warranted. (What, for instance, is a ‘fundamentalist regime’? A working definition might be – an unelected government with leaders avowedly guided by religious belief. But many journalists would find it very difficult, in practice, so to describe the Bush administration, appointed to power by the US Supreme Court, in 2000, despite garnering half a million fewer votes than the Democrat, Al Gore.)

In practice, therefore, to use such labels is always to take sides. They also generally mean the people labelled are unreasonable, which weakens the case for reasoning (negotiating) with them.

INSTEAD

11. INSTEAD always be precise about what we know. Do not minimise suffering but reserve the strongest language for the gravest situations or you will beggar the language and help to justify disproportionate responses which escalate the violence.

12. INSTEAD report what you know about the wrongdoing and give as much information as you can about the reliability of other people’s reports or descriptions of it. If it is still being investigated, say so, as a caution that the truth may not yet be known.

13. INSTEAD try calling people by the names they give themselves. Or be more precise in your descriptions – e.g. ‘bombers’ and, for the attacks of September 11 th, ‘suicide hijackers’ are both less partisan and give more information than ‘terrorists’.

AVOID

14. AVOID focusing exclusively on the human rights abuses, misdemeanours and wrongdoings of only one side.

15. AVOID making an opinion or claim seem like an established fact. This is how propaganda works – e.g. the campaign, primarily aimed at US and UK media, to link Saddam Hussein to ‘international terrorism’ in early 2002. Under a headline linking Iraq to the Taliban and Al Qaeda, came the claim that ‘Iraqi military intelligence officers are said to be assisting extreme Palestinian groups in attacks on Israel... [emphasis added]’. ‘Said to be’ obscures the question of who is doing the saying. See also ‘thought to be’, ‘it’s being seen as’, etc.

16. AVOID greeting the signing of documents by leaders which bring about military victory or a ceasefire as necessarily creating peace.

17. AVOID waiting for leaders on ‘our’ side to suggest or offer solutions.

INSTEAD

14. INSTEAD try to name ALL wrongdoers, and treat allegations made by all parties in a conflict equally seriously. This means, not taking at face value, but instead making equal efforts to establish whether any evidence exists to back them up, treating the victims with equal respect and the finding and punishing of all wrongdoers as being of equal importance.

15. INSTEAD tell your readers or your audience who said what. That way you avoid implicitly signing up yourself and your news service to the allegations made by one party in the conflict against another.

16. INSTEAD try to report on the issues which remain, and on the needs and interests of those affected. What has to happen in order to remove incentives for further acts of violence? Ask what is being done to strengthen the means on the ground to handle and resolve conflict non-violently, to address development or structural needs in the society and to create a culture of peace?

17. INSTEAD pick up and explore peace initiatives wherever they come from. Ask questions of politicians, – e.g. about ideas put forward by grassroots organisations. Assess peace perspectives against what you know about the issues the parties are really trying to address; do not simply ignore them because they don’t coincide with established positions. Include images of a solution, however partial or fragmentary – they may help to stimulate dialogue.

Just another picture?

Images of men and women in conflict reporting often reinforce a variety of gender stereotypes. Women are often nameless victims who appear passive. In contrast, images of men display active figures, engaged in all sorts of activities from armed combat to political debates. When women and men are portrayed through gender stereotyped lenses, this impacts the behaviours, actions and attitudes of society. When women are portrayed only as victims in conflict reporting, we are led to believe that women are passive by nature, while men depicted as fighters, politicians and experts, are active and authoritative.



Photo: Marwin

A quick guide

Conflict Sensitive Journalism compared to traditional War Journalism

CONFLICT SENSITIVE JOURNALISM

peace/conflict orientated
truth orientated
people orientated
solution orientated

WAR JOURNALISM

war/violence orientated
propaganda orientated
elite orientated
victory orientated

Media monitoring

Focus: Gender

Date: _____

Media: _____

Section of the newspaper: _____



Look at the whole section/page and answer the following questions.

Part I: IMAGES

How many images do you see in this section/page? _____

How many women are represented in these images? _____

How many men are represented in these images? _____

How many of the women are named? _____

How many of the men are named? _____

How many of the women are anonymous? _____

How many of the men are anonymous? _____

How many of these images give the impression of the woman as passive? _____

How many of these images give the impression of the man as passive? _____

How many of these images give the impression of the woman as active? _____

How many of these images give the impression of the man as active? _____

How many of these images give the impression that the woman is a victim of some sort? _____

How many of these images give the impression that the man is a victim of some sort? _____

How many of these images reproduce gender stereotypes? _____

How many of these images challenge gender stereotypes? _____



How many different articles are there? _____

How many of these articles have only male news subjects? _____

How many of these articles have only female news subjects? _____

How many of these articles have both male and female news subjects? _____

How many news subjects are there? (A news subject is any person whom the story is about, even if they do not speak. The story is about this person or about something the person has done): _____

How many of these news subjects are male? _____

How many of these news subjects are female? _____

How many of the male news subjects are quoted? _____

How many of the female news subjects are quoted? _____

If you look at the male news subjects. How many are mentioned with ...

age? _____

civil/relational status? _____

occupation? _____

If you look at the female news subjects. How many are mentioned with ...

age? _____

civil/relational status? _____

occupation? _____

How many of the men in the article are in the role of an expert? _____

How many of the women in the article are in the role of an expert? _____

How many of the male news subjects are victims? _____

How many of the female news subjects are victims? _____

How many of the articles reproduce gender stereotypes? _____

How many of the articles challenge gender stereotypes? _____

15 ideas for a more

“

Think the other way around. If you would have asked a successful career woman how she managed to get so far with kids, ask the same question to a successful career man. You might get interesting answers!

“

Put together lists of female experts in different topics and share with your colleagues!

gender aware news media

1. Conduct your own media monitoring! Analyze the results, discuss them with your colleagues and come up with ideas of how to change things for the better.
2. Be careful not to resort to reverse stereotyping in which you simply view women as passive victims, as sufferers. We also need to report stories that reflect women's courage, leadership; resilience and healing; as agents of change and peace building.
3. Does gender and biological sex matter? Is it necessary to mention that the doctor/artist/pilot news subject is female or is doctor/artist/pilot enough? Would you mention if the news subject were a man? When you add female you point out that the male is the norm and the female an exception. Of course sometimes gender matters – then you should report it. If not, avoid it.
4. Does clothing or looks matter? Is it really important for the story? Be especially aware if you only describe women's clothing or appearance.
5. Does age matter? Journalists are almost twice as likely to mention the age of their female news subjects as they are to mention the age of their male news subjects. Treat male and female news subjects the same way!
6. Does family status matter? Female news subjects are identified by their family status 4 times more than male news subjects. This masks women's other identities as independent, active participants in the wider society beyond the home.
7. Think the other way around. If you would have asked a successful career woman how she managed to get so far with kids, ask the same question to a successful career man. You might get interesting answers!
8. Test yourself. Take a text you wrote about a woman and replace her name with the name of a man. How does it sound? If it sounds silly you have probably used a couple of stereotypes.
9. Think in advance. When you plan who to interview for an article: make sure you interview both men and women. Don't forget to consider the number of women and men in images as well.
10. Be careful if women are only asked about personal experiences and never as experts! Studies show that women are mainly interviewed based on their personal experiences as women, mothers and wives, but rarely on the situation of women in general – or the situation in general.
11. Put together lists of female experts in different topics and share with your colleagues! For inspiration check out <http://rattviseformedlingen.se/equalisters>
12. Encourage women to participate. If a woman doesn't feel confident enough to participate – put a little effort into persuasion. One argument might be that there are few women in the news media and that she will be a good role model for other women.
13. Is it impossible to find a female expert in the field you are covering – ask yourself why. Perhaps it can be a good angle for an article?
14. It is also important to highlight that women are not always "good". Women participate in the war and make decisions during war. In order to ensure a just and correct representation of conflict, media also needs to depict women who deviate from the norm of "the good woman".
15. Don't forget the images. Always ask yourself how women and men are portrayed.

How to get more female experts into the news

A method inspired by the Equalisters (rattvisiformedlingen.se/equalisters).

Think of five areas where you usually only see male experts:

Choose one of these areas:

Do you already know any female experts in this area? Please write these down:

Where could you find more female experts in this area? (For example: universities, research faculties, organisations etc)

If you look at their websites and search the Internet, do you find more female experts? Please write them down as well:

How can you use social media to come up with more names? Please write down a strategy:

Discuss how you can share your list with your colleagues at work. Could you work together with them and make more lists? How could these lists be implemented in the daily news work? Please write down a strategy:

Action plan

What are the three most important things that you have learned in this workshop?

What will you be able to use in your work? Please write down three things:

What will you start with when you get back to work and how will you do this?

What do you hope to achieve with this? What is your goal?

What obstacles do you see?

How will you tackle these obstacles?

How and when will you review the results of your goal?

**Kvinna till Kvinna strengthens women in
conflict-affected regions, by providing
support to 130 women's organisations
based in the Middle East, South Caucasus,
Africa and the Balkans.**



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