

ADDRESSING STEREOTYPES

*A booklet to support reporting
with a gender lens*



*Guyana Association of
Women Lawyers*

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FOREWORD

In 2023, the Guyana Association of Women Lawyers (GAWL) commissioned research to determine the status of the media in general in Guyana in relation to reporting on gender - related matters.

While the Guyana Press Association (GPA), through its members, has been a willing participant in gender - sensitive training over recent years, the findings of the research demonstrate that there is still insufficient attention being paid by media practitioners, including editors, to gender and gender-related issues.

Accordingly, it was considered by GAWL to offer this booklet to support the GPA's efforts and as a reference tool for journalists and broadcasters in Guyana generally.

It is hoped that this booklet will be used to supplement other material that is available to assist media practitioners to improve their reporting on gender and through a gender lens.

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BOOKLET ON GENDER IN THE MEDIA

In section 19 of the Broadcasting Act 2011 of Guyana, the Broadcasting Policy of Guyana is clearly stated and guides all broadcasters i.e. journalists, television and radio presenters, by requiring that all programming reflect and disseminate content that:

- (h) serves the needs and interests, and reflects the circumstances and aspirations of Guyanese, including those of **equal rights and the multi-cultural** and multi-racial nature of the Guyanese society.”*
- (i) caters for a broad range of services, specifically for the programming needs of Amerindians, children, **women**, youth, the disabled, the underprivileged and rural residents.”*
- (o) **includes significant amounts of educational programming**, both curriculum-based and informal, on a wide range of social, political and economic topics, such as health, culture, Amerindian issues, **gender issues**, youth development, business, agriculture, science and technology, ecology and biodiversity and environment, legal and constitutional topics*

Print media is also assumed to be a part of provision’s intent.



What is GENDER?

GENDER refers to the roles of men and women, boys and girls in society. It is the state of being female or male with reference to **social or cultural** differences rather than biological differences. The Oxford dictionary defines the term as “male sex or female sex, especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones, or one of a range of identities that do not correspond to established ideas of male and female...”

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines GENDER as “the characteristics of women, men, boys and girls that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy as well as relationships with each other.

SEX, on the other hand, is how males and females appear physically.



Examples of Gender stereotypes

Women are better at being housewives and caring for children than men. Consider this as an example: This stereotype was perpetuated by the media portrayal of the activities of the mother of the children who perished in a fire which suggested that she had abandoned her children, and that she had gone to work. In more than one media report the suggestions were made on the one hand that there was abandonment of children, and on the other hand that she was not an attentive mother and was careless in leaving her children unattended. There was no further analysis to accurately determine the circumstances under which the family lived, nor was there any concern to enquire of the whereabouts of the children's father.

- o *Women are best suited to be teachers and nurses* – Examples: the advertisements online and in newspapers for jobs. For clerks and secretaries, only photos of females are used; for porters, only photos of men are used. These are suggestions of who is preferred for hiring.
- o *A woman must be quiet and passive*, and must not have opinions or be allowed to express them; *but men should be loud, talkative* and aggressive, and not quiet
- o *Women should not be in business* (small or big) and so do not need to be economically empowered; this is the man's domain *Girls/women cannot or should not do STEM*

or ROBOTICS, engineering or science - their brains are not wired for anything technical or scientific
o *Girls/women are weak and low in energy*
o *Leaders should only be men.* Women are poor at decision - making.

- o *Domestic violence perpetrators are only men*
- o *Only certain jobs can be performed by men i.e. welding, carpentry or operating heavy duty equipment*
- o **Only certain jobs can be performed by women e.g. cooking, baking and care-giving.**
- o **A woman should not work outside of the home; her responsibility is to care for children, which is not a father's responsibility.** An example: The letter to the editor of a newspaper from a father who objected to the film "Barbie".
- o **Women's bodies are best suited to entice regardless of the product being sold.** Example: the advertisement of the State oil company which portrays dancing female employees to secure sales of fuel and lubricants.
- o **Higher education should only be for men.** Women should focus on marriage, being a homemaker/caregiver, child - bearing and raising of children.

Men are entitled to hit women to ensure order is maintained in the home and to keep them obedient and "in line".



What is Gender bias?

This ties in with the stereotypes listed above. Gender bias can be described as one's expectations and assumptions, whether consciously or not, in particular about females (women and girls).

What is meant by Gender Equality?

Equal opportunities and resources being made available to and accessible by all - men and women, boys and girls.

Article 149 F (1) of the Guyana Constitution states:

“Every woman is entitled to equal rights and status with men in all spheres of political, economic and social life. All forms of discrimination against women on the basis of gender or sex is illegal”.

It is a reasonable expectation that any reporting or dissemination of material whether by print, broadcast or other form, reflect a balanced and unbiased approach. This is particularly to ensure that women and girls are not stereotyped. There ought not to be reporting or other forms of writing, programming or advertisement which blatantly suggests a bias in favour of men and their rights only.



What is meant by “Gender Equity”?

Essentially EQUITY translates to being ‘fair,’ or ‘fairness’. Gender Equity means that regardless of a person’s personal situation, that person must be able to receive a fair chance at benefitting from an opportunity and resources.

An example: It is not right or fair to give a male a better chance at obtaining a job over a female who has similar (though not the same) qualifications, with the only reason for not giving the female the job being her gender. The female may have different types of experience when compared to her male counterpart, but that does not mean that she was unsuitable for the job.

Therefore, GENDER EQUALITY and GENDER EQUITY go hand in hand.

Why is Gender important to Society?

It is important that people in general be encouraged to appreciate the roles of all and the purpose of each person, whether female or male. It is neither correct nor fair to make assumptions about someone because of the fact of their physical sex, and ignore their gender and potential or actual role.



Importance of Gender in Media Reporting

As stated earlier, the broadcasting policy of Guyana, as set out in the Broadcasting Act, cannot be ignored. It is incumbent on practitioners of media in all its forms to conduct their work with a gender lens. They must be alert at all times to the relevance of gender in their work.

Also, the “language memo” which has been published by the Guyana Press Association (GPA) and which encourages use of gender – sensitive language must also be applied.

The GPA seeks to monitor its members’ work and not police it, while continuously encouraging gender sensitivity. All broadcasters should self - monitor and comply with the policy and law as stated in the Broadcasting Act.



Tips for reporting with a gender based lens

Be armed with knowledge of:

- Laws and International Treaties
- Ensure that you read and understand the basics of important legislation that supports your knowledge on GENDER. This would mean understanding firstly the Constitution of Guyana and Articles 39 and 149F (1).
- Know key provisions of the Domestic Violence Act e.g. the purpose of the main order i.e. Protection Order, and of the other orders that can be granted, namely, Occupation and Tenancy Orders. Also become familiar with who can file for an order and the procedure. Be familiar with the rights of both the victim and the (alleged) perpetrator.
- Know the key provisions of the Prevention of Discrimination Act, the Sexual Offences Act and the Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act.
- Become familiar with the relevant international treaties or conventions e.g. the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women.

- Always keep abreast of amendments to any relevant laws and understand the importance of and reasons for the changes.

Also:

- Develop an awareness of the relevant persons/officers and agencies who or which can provide information on gender issues e.g. The Women and Gender Equality Commission (W&GEC), the Rights of the Child Commission (RCC), the Gender Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Human Services & Social Security, and the University of Guyana.
- Where there is uncertainty, consult with representatives of these agencies to help in your analysis of gender issues which may relate to a story or article being produced.
- Seek to structure your questions on why, where, when, what and how with gender issues in mind. This will help your readership & viewership to become aware and recognize the gender issues that may be involved.
- Be objective in your reporting on gender issues, as you would with other issues, ensuring accuracy of information including the name of an alleged victim.



Follow the media guidelines on reporting on interpersonal violence (a document published by the Philanthropy Alumni and Civic Engagement (PACE), Office of the Vice- Chancellor of the University of Guyana (UG) and UNICEF). This document provides important advice, for example:

- Be careful with sources of information since their accounts may be flawed due to that person being a witness who was only present for part of an occurrence;
- Seek to get to the truth and not make assumptions (as these tend to become fact (albeit inaccurate));
- Always remember your role; remember the “burden of responsibility”, and ensure that you are a trusted source.
- Articles and reports should not only seek to bring facts, but provide analysis on related gender issues including possible solutions.
- Follow -up work could easily translate to follow - up articles and further information which can be used to further educate the population.

Gender sensitivity in visual depictions, photographs & cartooning.

A continuous awareness of gender equality and practice of gender sensitivity should guide a journalist's or broadcaster's choice of visuals that are chosen to accompany an article or report made in any medium.

Likewise, for stand - alone cartoons, while entertainment value is paramount, educational value is important and the depiction should at all times be gender - sensitive. In instances where the depiction can be interpreted as disrespectful to women or men, a review of the content should be done to make adjustments or cancel its use altogether.

Cartoons, photographs, graphics should never perpetuate a gender stereotype such as those referred to earlier.



Recommendations of sources

Further guidance can be obtained from these sources:

- The Constitution of Guyana (see website of the Ministry of Legal Affairs)
- Guyana Media Guidelines for Reporting on Interpersonal Violence (As published by the University of Guyana – PACE, Office of the Vice-Chancellor)
- The reports of the Media Monitoring Committee of the W&GEC.
- <https://waccglobal.org/violence-against-women-in-media-and-digital-content/>
- <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/multimedia/2018/3/photo-gender-equalitythrough-cartoonists-eyes>
- Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #5

