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## Motivations for Choice of Course and Career Preferences of Nigerian Female Students: Implications for the Status of Media Women in a Developing Nation.

by **Nnamdi B. Emenyeonu\***

### **Abstract**

This paper presents a survey of Nigerian female students to determine their motivations for taking up journalism training. The study found that almost as many female as male students enrol in the country's journalism training institutions at the moment – which factor should advance women's representation in the media. Moreover, most of the female students surveyed consider journalism to be a profession as much suited for women as for men. However, it finds marital status to be an important factor in career choice; married students said they would quit work if it interfered with their family responsibilities. Secondly, most respondents tended to prefer more glamorous roles in television, radio, public relations or advertising to aspects of journalism such as reporting. These two factors have important implications for career advancement of women journalists and may continue to exacerbate women's under-representation in Nigeria's mass media institutions.

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# Motivations dans le Choix des Cours et Carrières des Etudiantes Nigériennes: Implications pour le Statut des Femmes des Médias dans le Développement de la Nation

## Résumé

Cet exposé présente une enquête sur des étudiantes nigériennes pour déterminer leur motivation eu égard à leur intérêt vis-à-vis de la formation dans le journalisme. L'enquête a révélé qu'il y avait presque autant d'étudiantes que d'étudiants qui se faisaient inscrire dans les institutions de formation journalistique du pays, ce qui actuellement constitue un facteur bénéfique pour la promotion de la représentation féminine au sein des médias. La plupart des étudiantes en question considèrent le journalisme comme une profession aussi bonne pour les hommes que pour les femmes. L'enquête a cependant révélé que le statut matrimonial était un facteur important dans le choix d'une carrière. Les étudiantes mariées affirmaient qu'elles quitteraient leur travail si ce dernier se trouvait en désaccord avec leurs responsabilités familiales. Par ailleurs, la majorité d'entre elles ont montré un penchant pour des rôles plus prestigieux comme à la télévision, la radio, les relations publiques ou la publicité au lieu des aspects journalistiques tels que le reportage. Ces deux facteurs ont des implications importantes sur l'avancement des femmes journalistes dans leur carrière, et pourrait continuer à exacerber le peu de représentation des femmes dans les institutions des masses médias nigériens.



## Introduction

The dawn of journalism in Nigeria, in the mid nineteenth century, was marked by a preponderance of non-professionals who used their publications either to propagate a cause or to trade punches with colonial authorities. Early publishers like Henry Townsend, Herbert Macaulay and Richard Blaize, who were gainfully employed in the religious ministry, in engineering and in the legal profession, respectively, may not have considered journalism as a full-time career. All they wanted was to set up printing workshops and to disseminate, through their periodicals, whatever information or opinion they wanted to pass to the public.

This trend continued until the late 1930s when a 'new breed' of publishers who had acquired some skills and professional qualifications came into the scene. A notable name in that lot was Nnamdi Azikiwe who sought, among other goals, to demonstrate that journalism, like any other field of endeavour, could be made a successful business venture (*West Africa Pilot*, Nov. 22, 1937). His success in this direction engendered a new model among other practitioners who began to take up journalism as a full-time vocation.

It was, however, not until the early 1960s that formal and full-time education in journalism started in Nigeria. The pioneer degree-awarding journalism department in Nigeria was established at the University of Nigeria in 1961. Six years later, in 1967, the University of Lagos introduced a diploma course in mass communication and a degree programme in 1970. Bayero University, Kano, commenced a degree programme in mass communication in 1978.

In that initial period, candidates were reluctant to enrol in journalism. They seemed to have preferred to pitch their tents in other and more established courses like medicine, engineering, law and architecture. Initial intakes in the pioneer journalism departments were very scanty. The department of journalism at the University of Nigeria, for example, began with three students out of whom two were graduated in 1964. The lack of interest in journalism then was largely attributed to the low regard in which journalism was held at the time. Mark Twain summed up the status of journalists when he remarked that journalism practitioners 'came from among those who failed at ditching and shoe-making and fetched up in journalism on their way to work house' (Ekwelie, 1982).

Today, however, we are witnessing an explosive upsurge in the population of candidates who seek to major in mass communication. As Ibecheozor *et al.* (1983) put it: 'Today, journalism has suddenly acquired a new aura. It now appears to have a peculiar fascination for young people in search of careers . . . Journalists today can compete with their counterparts in other professions like law, medicine and engineering.' They attributed this new zeal to the professional training introduced in the universities. The products of these universities, they argued, are well educated, skilled and thoroughly grounded in the humanities, the social sciences and even in the general sciences.



The phenomenal growth of interest in mass communication education soon triggered an exponential growth in the number of journalism schools. From a humble beginning in the 1960s, we now have 40 journalism training institutions in Nigeria which offer courses in journalism either as a major or in combination with other related disciplines (Nwanwene, 1990). Of these, six are at universities and run diploma and degree programmes (two of them also have higher degree programmes), while the others, mainly polytechnics and media training schools, offer two-to-four-year diploma programmes. This figure does not include the road-side private schools which dot Nigeria, offering mass communication in addition to a wide range of courses.

Over the years, there has been a geometric increase both in the number of candidates seeking admission and in intakes. In 1988, for instance, 2,852 candidates applied for admission into the department of mass communication at the University of Nigeria, out of whom 75 were admitted (Nwanwene, 1990). That same year, the University of Lagos received more than 1,500 applications from candidates seeking admission in its mass communication department. Only 50 were admitted. At the University of Maiduguri's department of mass communication, over 800 applications were received for 20 vacancies in the undergraduate programme (ibid). In the polytechnics, the number of applications and intakes is more alarming. In 1988, for example, the Anambra State Polytechnic, Oko, had about 625 students enrolled in the department of mass communication.<sup>1</sup>

A remarkable feature of this new trend is the great zeal shown by an ever-increasing number of young women enrolling in communication studies. In some cases, the number of females applying for mass communication almost equals that of males. Of 1,152 candidates who applied for mass communication at the University of Nigeria in 1989, 651 were male while 501 were female.<sup>2</sup> In actual enrolment, the situation is the same. The male-female ratio in the departments of mass communication at the University of Maiduguri, Anambra State University of Technology, Enugu, Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu, and the Anambra State Polytechnic, Oko, is 1:1, 1:3, 1:3, and 1:2 respectively.<sup>3</sup>

Journalism, too, as a course, has undergone a series of rapid transformations. Today's journalism is no longer that of merely couching the five Ws and H in a historical recital. Instead, we now have a broadened discipline known as mass communications. Today's products of mass communication departments engage in public affairs reporting, interpretative reporting and investigative journalism. They work in the print and electronic media as correspondents, editors, programme producers and directors. All these tasks demand extra courage and ingenuity from the practitioner.

Furthermore, the hours of work are generally difficult, miserable and may not allow the professional to maintain an ideal family life. Worse still, in a situation such as Nigeria's, where corruption and all manner of vices have become a recurring national malady, the inspector-general role of the journalist continues to acquire more relevance. But we know that in response to that challenge the



journalist can, and often does, collide with, or step on the toes of, some unfriendly and ruthless forces. And therein lies the problem.

Considering the debilitating influence of deeply anchored traditional sex role stereotypes of women against the quest for a career which is not only exerting but hazardous, the wonder is, how prepared and willing these young women are to go into active journalism after graduation. Are they merely enrolling in mass communication as a matter of convenience, to acquire a certificate and end up in any other career? Or do we expect a stronger presence and more active involvement in the mass media by women?

## Some Related Literature

While it may be accepted that there is a tremendous interest in journalism among Nigerian women, actual research aimed at revealing their true motivations for choice of course and disposition to the career appears to be very sparse. A majority of studies on women in the media report findings on traditional sex-role stereotypes, perceived or real, which are likely to constitute barriers to career advancement for women in journalism.

For instance, Ferri and Keller (1986) sampled 136 female, full-time news anchors in commercial television stations. A majority of their respondents stressed the over-emphasis on physical appearance as a barrier. One of the respondents complained that people always asked his male co-anchor about the latest 'hot' story while they asked her about her clothes. Another barrier identified was the problem of overcoming stereotypical attitudes about women's appropriate roles in society. One of the anchors reported having once had a woman call up to say: 'Don't say Goodnight. That's a man's job.' Another anchor complained: 'My co-anchor (male) has a beer with local police, trying to make contacts or pick up some information. But when I do that, the officers are suspicious and make comments about me staying out late.' Yet another barrier mentioned was the conflict between their roles in the families and their career.

In a different study which examined the possible effects of the stereotypes on the career development of female journalists, Reep and Dambort (1987) reported that the stereotype factor was not strong enough to daunt women. They rather found, from a study of 13 programmes in which women played leading roles, that women were financially successful, excited about their career, and could be competent in demanding jobs. They, however, found that a majority of their respondents 'paid their price by being less than perfect mothers and by lacking romance.'

There is evidence that female journalism students indicate an equally favourable disposition to careers in journalism. Bowers (1974), for instance, asked fresh students in some journalism departments to compare journalism with other careers. He found, among other things, that more females than males considered

relations agency, eight (6.6%) mentioned radio and newspaper, respectively. Magazine and the advertising agency attracted six respondents each. See Table 2.

In terms of the specific areas they would prefer to work in, 39 (32.5%) said they would love to be newscasters (36 in television and three in radio). Thirty-seven (30.8%) mentioned reporting (23 in television, two in radio, five in newspaper and seven in magazine).

Public Relations attracted 18 (15%) respondents, advertising, 15 (12.5%), and programme production, 10 (8.3%). Only one respondent chose to lecture in mass communication. See Table 3.

*Table 3: Respondents' Preferences for Specific Roles in Journalism Fields*

Specific Roles	Frequency	Percentage
Newscasting (TV)	36	
(Radio)	3	
	(39)	32.5
Reporting (T.V.)	23	
(Radio)	2	
(Newspaper)	5	
(Magazine)	7	
	(37)	30.8
Public Relations	18	15
Advertising	15	12.5
Programme Production	10	8.3
Lecturing	1	0.9
Total	120	100%

Two major reasons which were given by the respondents who chose to work in television were 'glamour of the tube' (29%) and 'the desire to become popular and admirable' (33.3%). Respondents who chose to work in other media gave reasons such as 'the desire to keep society informed' (29%), 'the desire to get some exposure' (22.2%) and 'personal interest' (18%).

Asked to indicate the gender to which journalism was more suitable, an overwhelming majority, 116 respondents or 98.3% replied that journalism is a man's career as much it is a woman's. Only two respondents (1.6%) said that journalism was exclusively a man's career.

Asked what they would do if their career began to jeopardise their family life, more than half the sample — 83 respondents (69.1%) — said they would not be bothered. All in this category were single. Thirty-three respondents, including all



five married women in the sample, indicated that they would transfer to less demanding jobs. Four respondents said they would quit the career. See Table 4.

In response to the question regarding their perception of the performance of Nigerian female journalists, 66 respondents (55%) strongly agreed that Nigerian women in journalism were as good and as productive as their male colleagues, 36 (30%) agreed to this assertion, eight were neutral, while those who strongly disagreed or merely disagreed were five in each case.

Finally, in an obvious endorsement of a career in journalism, 110 respondents (91.6%) said they would choose to major and work in journalism-related fields if they had their lives to live again. Five women said they would try other courses and careers while another group of five respondents kept mute.

*Table 4: Respondents' Reaction Should Career Threaten Family Life*

Reactions	Frequency	Percentage
Won't be bothered (will stay put)	83	69.1
Will seek less-demanding jobs	33	27.6
Will quit the job	4	3.3
Total	120	100%

## Discussion

Contrary to pedestrian conjectures that Nigerian female journalism students enrol in mass communication studies as a matter of educational convenience, i.e. to acquire a degree or diploma where they can do so most comfortably and thereafter pursue non-journalism careers, this study has shown that the women journalists-in-the-making appear to be willing to cast aside traditional sex-role stereotypes for careers in journalism. A majority of the respondents in this study stated that they chose the course freely and out of a genuine interest to become professional media practitioners. Further, most of those studied said they were willing to work in journalism areas after their education. With these results, this study corroborates studies done in some other countries which reported that stereotypes and other barriers imposed on women by society are not compelling enough to deter women from going into journalism. Nigerian female journalism students can, therefore, be said to share the same zeal with their kind in other countries to invade formerly male-dominated areas such as journalism.

Thus, there appears to be a cause for respite among concerned women media practitioners and educators who have, at several forums, lamented the under-representation of women in the media, especially in developing countries. In other words, based on the results of this study, and other things being equal, there are chances of levelling up the gap to the advantage of women when this breed of determined journalists-in-training are finally graduated.



There is, however, an indication that this ambition may take a long time to translate to reality. Part of the findings in this study indicates a possibility that the commitment of the female journalism students to stick to careers in journalism may begin to wane with a change in marital status. Since the respondents who said a clash between their career and family life would not bother them were largely single, their responses may have been influenced by their having little or no stake in marital responsibilities. Judging also that all married respondents in the entire sample stated that under such a conflict, they would seek refuge in other careers, it is plausible that most respondents in the former category would have answered differently were they married. If that is the case, there are chances then that marital encumbrances can significantly impair career advancement, if not choice, among would-be Nigerian female journalists.

There is also cause to doubt the claim by the female journalism students that they are willing to face the hazards of the career as indicated in their readiness to accept hazardous beats and difficult assignments. A response to the question concerning the specific areas of the media they would prefer to work in showed that only 37 (30.8%) would be willing to take to reporting. Even then, more than half of this lot said they would wish to report for television as correspondents. The rest of the sample chose relatively safer roles such as news anchorage, advertising, public relations and programme production. It is hard to reconcile the seeming ambivalence in the respondents' claim to be ready to brace up to the challenges of journalism and their reluctance to go into such areas as reporting which forms the hub of the profession and, therefore, offers the real test of guts and expertise required to excel in the career.

## **Implications for the Status of Media Women**

One claim put up by the protagonists of equal opportunities for male and female media practitioners is that, often women in the media are sexually harassed and compartmentalized into areas or roles that deal with feminine, children's, and often frivolous, affairs.<sup>4</sup> The results of this study show that the young female journalists-in-the-making may be perpetuating the situation through their penchant for the glamorous areas of journalism. First, in terms of preference of media, a majority chose television, their reasons being that television was a glamour medium and that they would like to be popular and admirable. Since television is chiefly a visual medium, it is likely that the admiration these young women are looking for is that of their physical appearance not of their out-put. It should not take a television presentation alone to be admired. A good female reporter or writer in a newspaper or magazine can as well be admired, but on the basis of her contribution to the publications.

While not denying the debilitating effects of sex discrimination in appointments, assignment of roles, promotion and career advancement of women media practitioners, the fact remains that no media manager would entrust serious or



sacred assignments or positions to any sly and unenterprising staff member, irrespective of sex or other biographic variables. If anything, those female journalists who play the role of office pets who want to be admired and who want to be excused the difficult beat can only earn the bosses' friendship for as long as they satisfy their sexual advances.

To rise to the position of an editor, director or any other position of authority in the media, one has to wade through exerting and challenging assignments which endear the enterprising journalist to one's peers and bosses and earn incontestable promotions. Notable Nigerian women journalists like Amma Ogan, Bilkisu Yusuf, Fati Isma Abdu, May Allen Ezekiel as well as their contemporaries in other African countries (Elizabeth Ohene of Ghana and Flavia Ngoma of Cameroon, for example), who have edited quality and prestigious periodicals, must have reached there by showing reportorial prowess and exceptional expertise.

In order to bridge the gap, therefore, and as an insurance against the vulnerability to sexual harassment, women media practitioners should be more willing to go into such hitherto 'masculine' areas as reporting, current affairs programming, photojournalism, film production, printing and media sales. They should also pool resources or exploit their 'connections' to set up their own publications. The publishers of *Classique*, *Hints*, *T.S.M.*, *Poise* and others are already blazing the trail in this direction. That way, women communicators can most practically determine media content. This can, in turn, remove the imbalance both in content and management which they have often complained of.

There is an acute paucity of female journalism educators in Nigeria. Of about 66 lecturers who teach in the departments of mass communication in six Nigerian Universities, only seven are women. The same picture also obtains in polytechnics. At the 1988 biennial conference of the ACCE held in Jos, Nigeria, Okunna (1988) analysed the implications of the domination of communication education in Nigeria by men. According to her, issues that are of interest to women are hardly treated in class and female journalism students are graduated with male-oriented ideas. With only one respondent in a sample of 200 young women opting to take a career in communication education, the problems of a male-dominated journalism education will remain unabated. Indeed, not only will it affect the training of female journalists, it will also rob the entire journalism education system of the special touch of women who are generally endowed with an innate astuteness in teaching. It may, therefore, be worth mounting a campaign to appeal to more female journalism graduates to pursue higher degrees, at least, to qualify for lecturing in mass communication.

## Conclusion

We investigated the motives which inspire Nigerian female journalism students into studies in journalism, and their career preferences. It was found that young



Nigerian women are ready to take courses and careers in journalism regardless of the traditional sex-role stereotypes which seem to zone journalism to the domain of men. A majority of the respondents said they chose to read journalism in order to qualify as journalists. Most of the respondents, too, are willing to work in journalism-related areas after graduation. In the view of a majority of these respondents, journalism as a career suits women as much as it does men. It was, however, concluded that family responsibilities, more than stereotypes about the appropriate roles of women, can deter women from making an impressive career in journalism.

An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated their willingness to put up with the exerting demands of the profession. Ironically, however, they shied away from the more exerting areas of journalism, preferring to take up roles in television and other less turbulent jobs such as advertising, public relations and programme production. It was concluded that this pattern of job preference would not provide the kind of leverage that women need to overcome the problems of their under-representation in the media in Nigeria and other developing countries.

Fraught with limitations, especially the non-application of statistical tests, the results of this study can be held as tentative. They, however, provide an instructive insight into the occupational values, attitudes and preferences of budding female journalists in Nigeria. Even though the results are not indicative of a dynamic attitude among the women towards overcoming the imbalance in female representation in the media, it can be safely concluded that the Nigerian female journalism student has a favourable disposition to training and a career in journalism which goes beyond a mere choice of convenience.

## Notes

1. Figures obtained from the department's enrolment register.
2. Joint Admissions and Matriculation Examinations Result List for 1989, Admissions Office, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
3. Figures obtained from records at the various institutions.
4. Such claims were repeatedly made in different papers by Doyin Abiola, Bernadette Cole, and Chinyere Okunna at a workshop on 'The Status of Women and Communication Systems: Structural Relationships' during the ACCE Biennial Conference in Jos, Nigeria, in October 1988.

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