



Journalists
Training Module



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Feminist Facilitation of Journalist Training Climate Change

1. Introduction

Climate change is the single most pressing global issue of our era. While scientists are in agreement that the Earth is heating up as a result of more and more human activities, the exact impact of climate change on the planet and its inhabitants is still uncertain. Climate change affects various aspects of our lives, including food and water resources, health and wellbeing, and energy use. Not to mention its far-reaching implications for the environment and the natural world. While climate change is a somewhat contentious issue in some areas of the globe, it is vital that we work towards a sustainable future for our planet. In light of climate change, it is important that media attention to the environment, and in particular climate change, increases in order to educate people about the issues at stake and potential solutions. The media plays a key role in shaping public opinion on scientific and environmental issues, and few would disagree that the media has been working below par in recent years on the coverage of climate change.



1.1 Importance of Climate Change Reporting

When Univision, the most widely watched Spanish language news channel in the United States, failed to provide any coverage of the historic 2006 United Nations Climate Change Conference, many Americans, particularly Hispanic and Latino Americans, were left in the dark on an issue that is expected to have significant global implications in coming years. A 2006 report by the nonprofit organization, Project for Improved Environmental Coverage, documented that television news coverage in the United States did not accurately reflect the level of scientific certainty about climate change, did not clearly communicate the significance and relevance of the issue to citizens, and was often not proportional to the potential effects of climate change or the amount of attention it was receiving from policy makers and the public. Such inadequacies in climate change reporting result in part from journalists' personal views and attitudes on the issue, as well as from perceived priorities of news audiences. It is important to recognize that journalists' perceptions of their audience can often be more influential than actual audience knowledge, and that individuals in society often take cues on public issues from the media. Climate issues are no exception: A 2009 study found that public opinion across the world on the seriousness of climate change had declined since 2007 in spite of increasing scientific evidence that global warming is occurring. In short, journalism is an important variable in the equation of public concern and policy action on climate issues. At a global level, climate change gateway reported on the United Nations Environment Programme's analysis of gaps in climate change coverage which build a compelling case for the importance of solutions such as a journalist training toolkit on the environment.

1.2 Role of Journalists in Shaping Public Opinion

In contrast to this, there are examples of pioneering journalists and media corporations who have striven to mobilize public opinion and promote positive change on global environmental issues by becoming advocates for the environment. An example is the WWF's "The People and the Planet" global conservation communication project. Through this, the media has the power to change information, attitudes, and behavior and the state of the global environment. At the international level, journalists and media corporations act as a powerful force in shaping a global environmental agenda. This can have detrimental or constructive effects on the state of the global environment. Corporate global journalism is often meant to serve economic interests through news dissemination and advertising designed to alter public opinion and policy making, which will create more favorable conditions for clients' investments, products, and services. In unfortunate cases, this may involve political or corporate assassination of opposing views to prevent damage to clients' interests. In terms of environmental issues, it would mean pushing certain types of environmental problems or solutions to the detriment of the public and the environment.

At the national level, journalists are able to set the agenda for public opinion and private and public official actions on environmental issues using reportage and in-depth reporting. This agenda can have very real effects. An example is the Watergate scandal, where journalists were able to uncover and report the truth, leading to a change in the national agenda and resignation of President Richard Nixon in the US.

The Uncle and Custodial theories suggest that journalists act as a society's surrogate uncle or custodian and are best positioned to discern and act upon the societies best long-term interests. Journalists traditionally act to fulfill this role by providing information on environmental issues and accepting the role as an educator and task setter, and then moving onto the custodial stage where they play a Watchdog role over public officials and helping to craft an agenda for the direction of public policy in the interest of the public and the environment. This takes place at national and international levels.

Journalists have been known to be the most prominent media agenda setters and king makers, according to Shoemaker and Reese. "Those parts of the world that journalists ignore or that are hidden from the media vision, remain unimportant. Issues competing for space or air time in the media are those labeled important" (Shoemaker and Reese, 194). This trend is also observable in the context of environmental issues.



1.3 Need for Feminist Approaches in Journalism Training

Traditional journalism training has made little attempt to question the gender assumptions underlying journalistic practice. It has been 'normal' for journalism to be understood androcentrically, with the male experience and perspective being both implicitly and explicitly taken as the norm. This has occurred in the stories journalists choose to cover, the ways in which events are understood and framed, and how journalism ethics are understood. Feminist scholars have long critiqued the presumed neutrality of mainstream journalism and have shown how journalistic practices tend to reinforce gender binaries and stereotypes. Given this, feminist educators suggest that it is important for journalists to engage in a process of critical self-reflection on gender socialization and how it has impacted on their own world views and values. By doing so, journalists can begin to identify how their assumptions about gender have influenced their work and how they might change their journalistic practice in order to ameliorate gender inequalities.

In discussing the need for feminist approaches to journalism training, it is important to begin by addressing the postmodernist critique of feminism. Rather than accepting the essential identities assumed by modernist feminists, postmodernists claimed that identity categories (such as 'woman' or 'man') are socially constructed. In doing so, postmodernists opened up a space in which essential gender categories were no longer the focus of feminist theory. Instead, feminists began to focus on deconstructing the socially constructed binary gender categories and the presumption that all individuals fit into one of two categories. This shift has important implications for journalism training and practice.

2. Understanding Feminist Facilitation

Feminists have given much thought to the ways in which marginalized groups can be given a voice and empowered. This can be said to be a central aim of training on climate change, particularly when one takes into account the fact that women are often affected more harshly by the impacts of climate change and yet are frequently excluded from significant participation in decision-making processes. By understanding how to create a learning environment in which the voices of both women and men from various social groups can be heard and respected, the training participants will be putting some feminist principles into practice. Eliciting understanding from the trainees about how climate change impacts people from different social groups and ways in which they can all engage in decision-making around these issues is a feminist goal in itself.





Empowerment of marginalized groups is not simply a matter of allowing them to speak alongside the more powerful, but of creating spaces in which they feel comfortable to speak and where their knowledge and experiences are valued (Long et al., 2007). This can be the ideal for a training space, and yet it is not an easy task to achieve.

In creating a theoretical framework for a feminist training approach, it is useful to consider what is meant by a feminist approach. As Tillie Curran (2005), a women's leadership trainer explains, "Feminism is not always about women-only spaces or a feminist perspective curriculum. Sometimes it is just women being able to participate fully in life; it is the facilitator creating a way for women to be heard and respected, particularly in mixed groups." Feminism is not a fixed ideology, and there is no definitive feminist theory; feminists have different (and often conflicting) ideas about the best way to achieve gender equality. However, what they share is a commitment to this goal. There is plenty of scope to adapt feminist theory to fit with the aims of training on climate change, and it is important not to see it as a bolted-on extra, but an approach that can inform and be a part of the training itself.

2.1 Exploring Feminist Principles in Facilitation

Challenging the dominant discourse of power/knowledge is to begin to change the rules about how knowledge is generated and transmitted. 'Traditional educational models implicitly or explicitly rely on the arrangement of power over others' (Bell and Desai, 2011). In training environments, trainers often assume their power, yet popular education methodology calls for 'breaking down the false dichotomy between the educator and the educand' (Bell and Desai, 2011). Empowering others to also take on the role of educator is key to the building of a movement and a hands-on participatory learning environment on any given issue. This calls for a shift in roles and relationships, and a conscious effort to share and redistribute the power currently held by the facilitator.

Feminist theory is a diverse and evolving body of knowledge which is situated in different disciplines but always with an eye to how gender and power inform the generation of theory and knowledge. In trying to understand what feminist facilitation would mean, it is critical to have an understanding of how knowledge is generated, shared, and learned in training environments and what learning in a way that is aware and transformative about gender and power would look like. Bell and Desai (2011) posit that feminist education is an exercise in 'exposing, analyzing, and working actively against the exercise of domination in its many forms'.



The term 'feminist' is often loosely used in the tagline of an event to demonstrate a commitment to gender equality, yet without a deep exploration of what feminist methodologies might mean in the context of an educational process. The assumption of the term feminist is often that it simply gives a new name for women or adds women to already established studies. Cornell (1981) has defined feminist theory as asking the questions 'how is knowledge gendered?' and 'what are the politics of gender in knowing?'. This would suggest that all studies could have a feminist perspective, and that simply being a woman or including women in a study does not necessarily make it a feminist investigation.

2.2 Creating Inclusive and Safe Spaces for Learning

- Respect and affirmation of our autonomy and self-worth
- Respect for cultural differences and traditional knowledge, coming from a place of trying to understand
- Emotional safety in speaking the truth and showing vulnerability
- Recognition of historical harms and present realities without guilt or defensiveness
- Freedom to express anger and a lot of silence
- Practical support for self-care
- Trust and getting to know facilitators in informal time.

In *Embodying Change*, we found that for each of the modules, it was necessary to spend time discussing what a safe space looks like and then to periodically check in with the group on how safe the space feels and what can be done to increase its safety. A group-generated list of what makes a safe space is a useful reference point for a facilitator and can be posted on the wall at the beginning of a session or module. An example of such a list generated by a group of indigenous women from the FEMNET's Second Feminist Conference of Parties in response to the question "what makes a safe space for you given your experiences as women in relation to colonialism?" is as follows:

Creating a safe space is important in all learning, but is particularly crucial when dealing with challenging material such as the impacts of climate change and its gendered implications. This material is likely to produce anxiety, guilt, and feelings of powerlessness.



Ana

When people are feeling this way, they are less able to listen carefully, be open to new ideas, and act effectively. In such a context, learning can be made possible if a facilitator is able to create a safe space in which participants can confront their fears and sense of disempowerment and take on new ways of thinking without feeling overwhelmed by hopelessness, guilt, or confusion.

2.3 Addressing Power Dynamics in Training Sessions

Power dynamics can manifest in many ways within training sessions, often silencing those who most need to be heard. Facilitators may be the ones with the power to determine the content and flow of the training; at other times, participants, experts, or community members might have valuable information to offer. Power differentials often put the facilitator or expert in a one-up position, not acknowledging the skills and knowledge of the people with whom they are working. Facilitators may inadvertently recreate the original educational context. People who have been trained in non-oppressive learning settings sometimes feel at a loss about how to integrate their skills into a conventional classroom or training format. Their attempts to change the format or content may be seen as "resistance" when in fact, it reflects their experiences of learning in liberatory settings. In addition, there are also power dynamics around race, class, gender, language, and education. Facilitators who do not share the same social identities as the people they are working with may find it difficult to validate the skills and knowledge that these folks bring into the learning environment. In order to create a more supportive and empowering learning environment for all involved, it is essential that facilitators learn concrete strategies for intervention around power dynamics.





3. Incorporating Feminist Perspectives in Climate Change Reporting

Inarguably, both sex and gender are important factors when it comes to determining vulnerability and risks of climate change. However, very little research has been done pre-2008 on gender and climate change, specifically the focus on women and their experiences. The time trend in research funding for climate change and the introduction of gender research in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) second assessment report has impacted the increase in gender and climate change research. This gender research further adds how women have shown to be more vulnerable and have greater exposure to risks of climate change. It also emphasizes differences in women's and men's livelihoods and well-being, and the various strategies that women and men use to cope with the impacts of climate change. This empirical evidence will be used to create the gender theory in linking why it is important to have women's only policies in climate change and the value of women's participation in decision-making processes.

Approaching climate change from a feminist perspective means seeing the issue as more than just a naturally occurring process or a discrete environmental problem. Instead, it is an issue that raises fundamental questions about the organization of social power, about economic and social development, and about the relationship between humans and the natural world. Feminist analysis of climate change asks certain questions: How are the causes and effects of climate change distributed unevenly across the globe? Who is responsible for climate change? How do people and societies adapt to the impacts of climate change? And, what can be done to mitigate climate change and prevent further harm.

3.1 Challenging Gender Stereotypes in Climate Change Narratives

In addition to finding more space for the voices and experiences of women within journalism on climate change, feminist media scholars point to the need for challenging gender stereotypes. It is important to expose the taken for granted "truths" about women and men, and to question those which serve to devalue women and legitimate and naturalize global and local gender-based inequalities. A recent study examining the use of metaphors and images in climate change journalism found that whereas men are typically portrayed as political leaders who are able to provide solutions in this area, women are often portrayed as passive victims of climate change. The study found that such portrayals restrict women's participation in public debate on policy, as they are positioned as non-actors. An example of this can be seen in interviews with people in a remote village in Zimbabwe: "Women can't go anywhere to find work. We have to stay here because we're women. If we were men we could go somewhere and do something, but we can't." Such portrayals work to further disempower women and legitimate gender inequalities.





As an African Ecofeminist, there is a need to acknowledge how other research has shown that women are often used as symbols of nature in environmental discourse, thus reinforcing the idea that women are closer to nature than men. This is problematic both in essentializing women's identities and in devaluing nature and those (usually the poor and the powerless) who are closely dependent upon it. An Australian study found that women were frequently used as a conduit for delivering knowledge about environmental conservation to children, whereas men were shown undertaking practical environmental work. This positions women as having a primary responsibility for teaching children about caring for the environment, yet restricting their involvement in practical action. This is not Ecofeminist because such role portrayals can also serve to typecast women into certain occupations and to discourage women from entering male-dominated fields of employment in environmental policy and activism. These findings challenge the taken for granted acceptance of the progress of gender equality and show that there is much work to be done.

3.2 Highlighting Women's Experiences and Voices in Reporting

Women's experiences in any situation are diverse and complex, but too often, gender-blind reporting results in an inability to see these multifaceted experiences. Often, the assumption is that there is one reality, which is usually that of the male experience. A feminist perspective recognizes the different realities of men and women and seeks to give voice to those realities from the perspective of those who have lived them. This means reporting on the specific experiences of women in regards to climate change and how they are disproportionately affected. Women's traditional role in many societies as primary caregivers means that they are more vulnerable to the effects of environmental degradation and change. In times of natural disaster, women are more likely than men to die as a result of their lesser economic status and the fact that they stay behind to take care of dependent children and the elderly. In many cases, due to displacement resulting from climate change-induced natural disasters or slow onset changes, women become heads of their households with increased economic and social burdens. Reporting women's experiences will mean that women have a chance to see a reflection of their reality, and it is more likely that relevant policies and programs will be put in place to help them.



3.3 Examining Intersectionality in Climate Change Journalism

Media and policy success on gender and climate change is to be measured not only by the quantity and quality of representation of key issues and of women in climate change debates but also by its potential to effect real and positive change in the lives of women. This extends to climate change journalism. If an increase in media attention on the links between gender and climate change is to result in more inclusiveness and gender sensitivity in climate change policy, then there must be a two-way flow of information between feminist and women's groups and advocates, and the media. The media has an important intermediary role in publicizing the work of such groups, as well as holding governments and international agencies accountable for their commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment in their responses to climate change.

Incidentally, integrating a feminist perspective into climate change journalism is likely to lead to a significant shift in existing professional norms. Due to the application of the gender-aware approach, climate change journalism would be one that more effectively represents the complex reality of climate change in all its manifestations, thus engaging more deeply with diverse audiences. This is not to suggest that the incorporation of a gender perspective will lead to a unitary form of climate change journalism – just as feminists highlight diverse and often contradictory needs and interests between women, so feminist-inspired climate change journalism is likely to take many forms. Given the early stage of development in this field, conscious and ongoing efforts to provide gender-aware training for both new and existing journalists, as well as active mentoring and support, will be required to ensure the dissemination of accurate and effective climate change journalism by and for women.

4. Practical Strategies for Feminist Facilitation of Journalist Training

One of the more difficult insights we have come to understand is the many and varied ways climate change impacts on different communities, particularly those most marginalized in global society. This has led to accusations against climate journalists of complicity in perpetuating climate injustice. Clearly, for journalists to be effective agents of change in framing climate as a social and political issue, they need to be better equipped to understand and articulate issues of climate change and social justice. Hence, we suggest that a useful starting point for climate change journalism would be training journalists to produce what Robert M. Entman calls a 'critical exposé', revealing the socio-political causes and effects of climate change. Most importantly, this would involve teaching journalists to consider the interests of the public as a whole (particularly the most marginalized) ahead of the interests of political and commercial groups. This is vitally important in helping people to understand climate change as a real and pressing political issue, rather than a suite of risks to the environment. This then serves to create public demand for political action.



Entman uses the concept of news framing, a process of selective emphasis on certain events and issues in which journalists define problems, diagnose causes and predict future scenarios in ways that make these problems more or less amenable to change. It will be necessary to teach journalists to frame climate change and related social injustices in a way which encourages public and political mobilization to prevent further harm and take remedial action. Eschewing the 'catastrophe' frame which tends to engender a sense of helplessness, the aim would be to bring issues of climate justice to the forefront of public debate.

4.1 Designing Gender-Inclusive Training Modules

The design of the training modules is an essential factor in determining who benefits from the training. Gender-sensitive design of the training modules can ensure that women and men participants are given equal opportunity to benefit from the training. It can also help to ensure that women and men are both given the opportunity to explore the relationship between climate change and gender as well as the implications of climate change on women and men in the communities which they represent.

Designing gender-inclusive training modules is essentially about ensuring balanced participation and representation of women and men in the training process. This can be achieved by providing separate training for women and men, or ensuring that in mixed-sex training, women participants' needs are specifically addressed. The training will also need to be designed to accommodate the schedules and needs of women and men from diverse backgrounds. This may mean making the training shorter or longer, or at a different time of day than originally planned.

4.2 Incorporating Participatory Approaches in Training Sessions

When including participatory approaches in the design and implementation of training sessions, facilitators should ensure that women and men of diverse backgrounds have equal opportunities to participate and benefit from the training. Participation can take many forms, including involvement in needs assessments and training design, acting as source persons or storytellers, and involvement in the evaluation of training impact. The relative advantages and disadvantages of different participatory methods depend on the context and the groups being engaged, but when using participatory methods to facilitate dialogue and analysis, it is essential to create an environment of respect for all participants in which free and open exchange is possible.



Facilitators should pay special attention to enabling and enhancing the participation of women who are traditionally marginalized and who may face cultural or practical barriers to involvement. In some cases, special measures or separate sessions may be required to ensure that women have the opportunity to participate fully. Training designs should be flexible and responsive to the expressed needs of participants, allowing for adaptation during the course of the program. By engaging participants as active contributors in a process of learning and discovery, facilitators can help to ensure that training content is relevant and useful to their work.

4.3 Promoting Ethical and Responsible Reporting Practices

Initiate citizen journalism in the local underrepresented communities significantly affected by the issue. Create opportunities for independent journalists to tell the stories of the women, men, and different groups in these communities and the impact of climate change on their everyday lives and survival strategies. This could be an important entry point for creating gender-aware climate change news.

Provide professional development training on the gender dimensions of climate change provided by gender and climate change specialists. This training could be set up to happen at international climate change events and be incorporated into the pre-event activities. For example, the transfer of knowledge training for journalists involving UN experts on climate change and gender, as discussed earlier, featured as a method in designing specific training modules.

Connect the gender dimensions of climate change to concrete cases and impact. Media professionals often find it difficult to report on the abstract and long-term implications of climate change. It has been found to be much easier to engage journalists in the issue when cases and impacts are shown to have a human face. For example, media professionals working in developing countries have reported that work on gender climate adaptation fund projects is easier to sell to editors than stories on the broader gender and climate change links.

Encourage journalists to be reflexive on their own positionality and power as media professionals based on gender norms, stereotypes, and relations. Fuller (2007) provides excellent guiding questions for journalists to engage in this kind of reflexivity.

A number of practical action steps can be taken in training designs to promote gender-aware climate change reporting practices.



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