

**2010 NATIONAL GENDER FORUM, Accra**

**GHANA RESEARCH ADVOCACY PROGRAMME (G-RAP)**

**THEME:** *Civic Engagement for Gender Equality and Good Governance  
in Ghana: Sharing Experiences, Contesting Spaces, and Renewing  
Commitments*

**Title: Gender Equality Contesting Media Spaces: The  
Coverage of Gender in the Ghanaian Media**

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**DATE:** 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2010

## ***Abstract***

Issues on gender continue to contest with other issues for equal media representation but from the media's perspective, gender (women) may constitute *non-sensational news value* and remain marginalised across the globe. My paper provides a theoretical framework for inferring the extent to which the Ghanaian media has made women an '*invisible voice*' in relation to *other voices* (politics, conflicts, human interest, etc) in its news coverage. The findings indicate that difference in editorial attention to women issues and other gendered issues is vital for discussion related to the effects of gender coverage and women political representation. Although , reforming the existing media in Ghana to promote gender issues depends more on encouraging participation of women in social media, unless it is in cycle with mobilizing all relevant stakeholders ,Ghanaian media coverage on women would remain low.

## **Introduction and Review:**

According to (Van Zoonen 1991: McQuail, 2000:100), ‘gender is never given but varies according to specific cultural and historical settings ...and is subject to ongoing discursive struggle and negotiation’. This paper therefore situates gender in the Ghanaian context. Gender representation in governance processes, although from a ‘long, slow journey’ (Lafky, 1993) continues to contest with other issues for equal media representation. From the media perspective, gender constitutes ‘non sensational news value’ (Tuchman, 1978) hence for a long time, gender remained ‘marginalized in all types of media’ (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000) across the globe. This type of gender-media representation has led to social inequalities and hinders gender participation from our contemporary human democratic processes.

Conceptually, this study articulates the following theoretical perspectives: integration theory (Stamm, 1985; Jackson, 1971; Cox & Morgan, 1973; Mulphy, 1976), cultural feminist paradigm (van Zoonen, 1991) , gatekeeping theory (White, 1950; Shoemaker, 1991: McQuail, 2000: 276), and agenda setting theory (McQuail, 2000) to provide a frame work for inferring the extent to which the Ghanaian media has made gender an ‘*invisible voice*’ (Perry, 1994) in relation to other voices in its news coverage. The ensuing analysis is expected to help shape civic engagement processes in understanding how women are represented in the media and help policy makers to specifically engage the media as a tool for promoting gender equality for good governance in Ghana.

Existing literature on gender and media (Fejes, 1992) points to a fundamental ‘inequality in the media frequency appearance of women and men’ (Fejes, 1992). This has been possible due to the media’s selective role (McQuail, 2002), its ability to ‘frame’ (Tuchman, 1978) male and other issues with high news worthiness (Lester, 1980) leading to high media presence whilst gender (women) issues are assigned with low news value (Dijk, 1988) and passive presence (van Zoonen, 1991). The media in its selective and framing processes presents certain gender with more salient space (Entman, 1993) and social status (Shudson, 1995). It is against this context of inequitable

distribution of media space that feminist researchers assert that the media creates a system where women are ‘often marginalized’ (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000), ‘lose their voices and become ‘invisible’ (Perry, 1994). It is in support of the media’s unfair coverage of gender that Gans urge the media to ‘be *multiperspectival* and to serve all the varied groups in the society’ (Gans, 1979).

Berger (1995) also noted that ‘women are under represented in mass media texts’ and when they are given coverage; it is mostly reflected in the frames of ‘victims of crimes, sexual abuses, and sexual objects’. Simply, the media place less value on issues concerning women/ gender in terms of their civic integration and democratic processes.

In support of Berger’s view, Gerbner also noted that the media sometimes falls short of plural role by ‘under representing women, the elderly, and the young’ (Gerbner: Berger, 1995).

Despite the important contributions made by scholars in gender and media representations, a major question remains unexplored in the literature: The existing works in gender and media concentrated on Women / Men media representations (Brown & Campbell, 1986: Croteau & Hoynes, 2000) but not dwelling on the synergy between media’s civic responsibility and the promotion of democratic governance through equal gender representation. This current paper examines how values assigned to news categories and their ‘structural’ scale of high and low importance (Hansen, 1991) could affect media’s civic responsibility and engender equal access to democratic activities and subsequently equal gender representation in media spaces.

## **Theoretical Perspective**

Media liberal-democratic theorists maintain that news diversity is enshrined in the principles of ‘multiplicity of voices’ which remains an essential tool for effective ‘self-governance and cultural vitality’ (Voakes, Kapfer, Kurpius & Chern, (1996). They urge the media to embrace all news values in its representation because ‘a media system that does not reflect the diversity of its audiences remain irrelevant to the system of governance’ (Kurpius & Chern, (1996) and civic engagements.

Jacklin (1978) extended Voakes and associates’ media diversity concept further, to mean ‘representative of the community, which captures the democratic connection between news diversity and governmental efficacy’ (Jacklin, 1978). A representative community therefore entrenches the media’s civic responsibility in promoting efficacy of democratic functions through equal communal representations across gender and non gender news values.

Besides the liberal-democratic theoretical perspective of media ‘multiplicity’ and ‘diversity’ of voices in communal representation is the media mobilization and integration function theory. According to the media mobilization and integration advocates, the role of the media is not limited to equal representation of gender and non gender values but to ‘mobilize’ (Mandelsohn,1966:McQuail, 2000: 79) all divergent views and effect ‘integration’ (Stamm, 1985; Jackson, 1971; Cox & Morgan, 1973 and Mulphy, 1976 : McQuail, 2000) of gender values in all governance processes.

A third theoretical perspective of the media and its civic engagement for gender equality and good governance can be well situated in the media’s responsibility to the ‘public interest paradigm’ (McQuail, 2000:142) and Held’s ( Held, 1970: McQuail, 2000: 143) ‘ majoritarian view’ of the media as acting responsibly toward social and political cohesion of the society. For instance, according to Hocking (1947: McQuail 2000) ‘it is the public interest that should take precedence over’ any other news value. It is essential to state that the extent of the media’s civic engagement of

gender equality promotion depends to a larger extent on the media's commitment to its social responsibility, and democratic values.

In addition, from the cultural feminist media perspective, the media with its embodiment of 'patriarchal realities' (Radway, 1984; Ang, 1985; McQuail, 2000: 310) questions the extent the media can challenge gender marginalization within dominant discourses. Essentially, the media is looked at with a sense of suspicion due to its ability to give certain news category higher-pitch whilst others are accorded with low pitches.

The media's role in directing the public as to what to make sense of within the paradigms of agenda setting mechanisms can be said to also select and deselect news values. This form of selection process remains possible due the media's gatekeeping parameters.

With the above theoretical background, it is important to establish the extent of influence of the above media theories on how the Ghanaian media engages gender in its news selection and coverage. Furthermore, these theories would help to throw more light on the synergy between relevant media theories and the media's civic responsibilities.

Specifically, drawing from the identified theories above, it becomes possible to measure the level of media marginalization among women. Interestingly, scholars have not given a great attention to class (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000) in gender (women) oriented news content and the relationship between women as of social legitimacy (Shudson, 1995). The social legitimacy accorded women by the media remains very critical to Ghana's democratic processes. In its simplest terms, democratic governance depends largely on intangible values such as freedom of representation and equal representation. Therefore, citizen's participation and civic engagement through the media are indispensable (Raboy & Dagnais, 1995: 35).

**Study Objective:**

Apart from helping shape civic engagement processes towards (gender) women media representations, women empowerment, the analysis will help engage the media as a tool for promoting gender equality for good governance in Ghana. It goes beyond the study of gender in the context of stereotypical male /women relationships. The paper explores types of gender and class that constitute gender news sources and values in the Ghanaian media's coverage.

In addition, it argues that gender related studies should not be limited to research on women/ men and their inadequate representation relationships but also critically link relevant media theories to media and civic engagements, and gender representation.

The Centre for Media Analysis (CMA),<sup>1</sup> an independent media research and monitoring agency in Accra, conducted a content analysis on 45 newspapers from 2005 to 2009 to investigate the coverage of gender in relation to other news categories and features. The study concluded that the newspapers studied, underrepresented gender with the following marginalized coverage in 2005: (3%); 2006 (3%); 2007 (7%); 2008 (3%); 2009 (2%). It is against this existing results from CMA that the author studied news editorials to measure the extent of news editors' sensitivity to gender equality and editors' civic responsibility to gender and governance processes.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.cmarglobal.com](http://www.cmarglobal.com) (CMA is an Independent Media Monitoring and Research Agency.)

### **Research Question – Problem:**

The purpose of this study is to examine how the Ghanaian media covered general gender issues and other non-gender news content. The study is based on newspaper editorials from 2005 – 2009. The following are the research questions:

- R Q 1.            Would news editors marginalize and under represent gender in their editorial coverage?
- R Q 2.            Would news editors give more prominence to other issues (non-gender) than issues on gender?

### **Methodology & Definitions:**

News Content Analysis is selected as the appropriate tool in allowing for systematic data collection, assigning quantitative – numerical values to news contents aim at yielding replicable and reliable results.

### **Unit of Study:**

The study unit of this study is editorials as published by the selected media. This study unit was appraised against a set of news editorial categories such as *Gender* otherwise known as: (Women; Children, Youth; Men). News stories that did not fall within these categories such as Politics, Health, Education, Social, Agric, ICT and Telecommunication, Social Conflicts, Human Interest, Banking, Insurance, Mining, Oil & Gas, Tourism, Security Agencies, were grouped under the category *Other*.

News editorials were selected as the appropriate unit since they constitute media houses in – house editorial team observations and policies that have the potential to set Political, Cultural and Social Agenda for the Country.

### **Sampling:**

Purposeful sampling was used. The sampled sources comprise Ghanaian newspapers, the state-owned and the private. Sports and entertainment newspapers are not included in this study due to their news role. The following newspapers were selected for the study:

- State Owned Newspapers: *Daily Graphic and the Ghanaian Times*
- Private Newspapers: *Daily Guide and the Chronicle*

The justification for selection of the state owned media is based on its extensive coverage, national orientation and serves as a national policy mouth piece. The private news papers were selected for being very consistent in the newspaper newspaper stands and with a level of high circulation among the private newspapers.

### **Reliability Test:**

To ensure validity of the results, coder reliability test was employed- Coder Reliability Data test was 85%. Reliability in content analysis allows categorized content definition to be agreed among coders about the categorizing content.

Once the time frame was established – year 2005 to 2009, all the editorial articles in the four newspapers were collected. To ensure data validity, two set of coders replicated the process of coding where statements were categorized according to type (women, youth, children, etc) and quantified. Using the following formula adapted from Riffe, Lacy and Fico (1998: 130), the results were replicated

$$Scott\ Pi = \frac{\%OA - \%EA}{1 - \%EA}$$

### **In which:**

**OA = observed agreement between two coders**

**EA = expected agreement between two coders**

An example of how content unit is validated is shown below:

## RELIABILITY MEASUREMENT

Samples of Content Units Needed for Reliability Test for Inter-coder Agreement level			
Population	<i>Assumed Level of Agreement in</i>		
	85%	90%	95%
<b>Population size</b>			
10,000	141	100	54
5,000	139	99	54
1,000	125	92	52
500	111	84	49
250	91	72	45
100	59	51	36

Reliability Simple Agreement Test	
Name of Category (Variable)	Number of Units
Coder Pairs	Outcome
Richard and Abena	9 Agree 1 Disagree
Daniel and Nancy	9 Agree 1 Disagree
Nancy and Abena	8 Agree 2 Disagree
Nancy and Richard	9 Agree 1 Disagree
Abena and Daniel	9 Agree 2 Disagree
Richard and Daniel	10 Agree 0 Disagree
<b>Total</b>	<b>54 Agree 7 Disagree</b>
<b>Test Reliability Measurement</b>	
$Pi = \frac{\% OA - \% EA}{1 - \% EA}$	
in which: OA = observed agreement EA = expected agreement	

## RESEARCH FINDINGS:

The study revealed that out of 881 news editorials recorded in the year 2005 , 0.3% focused on Women , 0.2% on the Youth while 0.4% were on Children, constituting only 1% of the total number of issues raised by news editors on Gender.

In the year 2006, editorial commitment towards gender issues, showed a significance increase of 7% (Women- 2.2%, Youth – 1.9%, Children- 2.9%); indicating a 6% rise from the year 2005.

Conversely, findings revealed a consistent representation of editorial attention to Gender issues from the year 2006 , 2007 and 2008 as total 7%, 7%, and 7% were recorded respectively compared to other issues. In the year 2009 however, attention on gender coverage dropped to 4%, revealing a 3% decline in projection of gender issues by news editors.

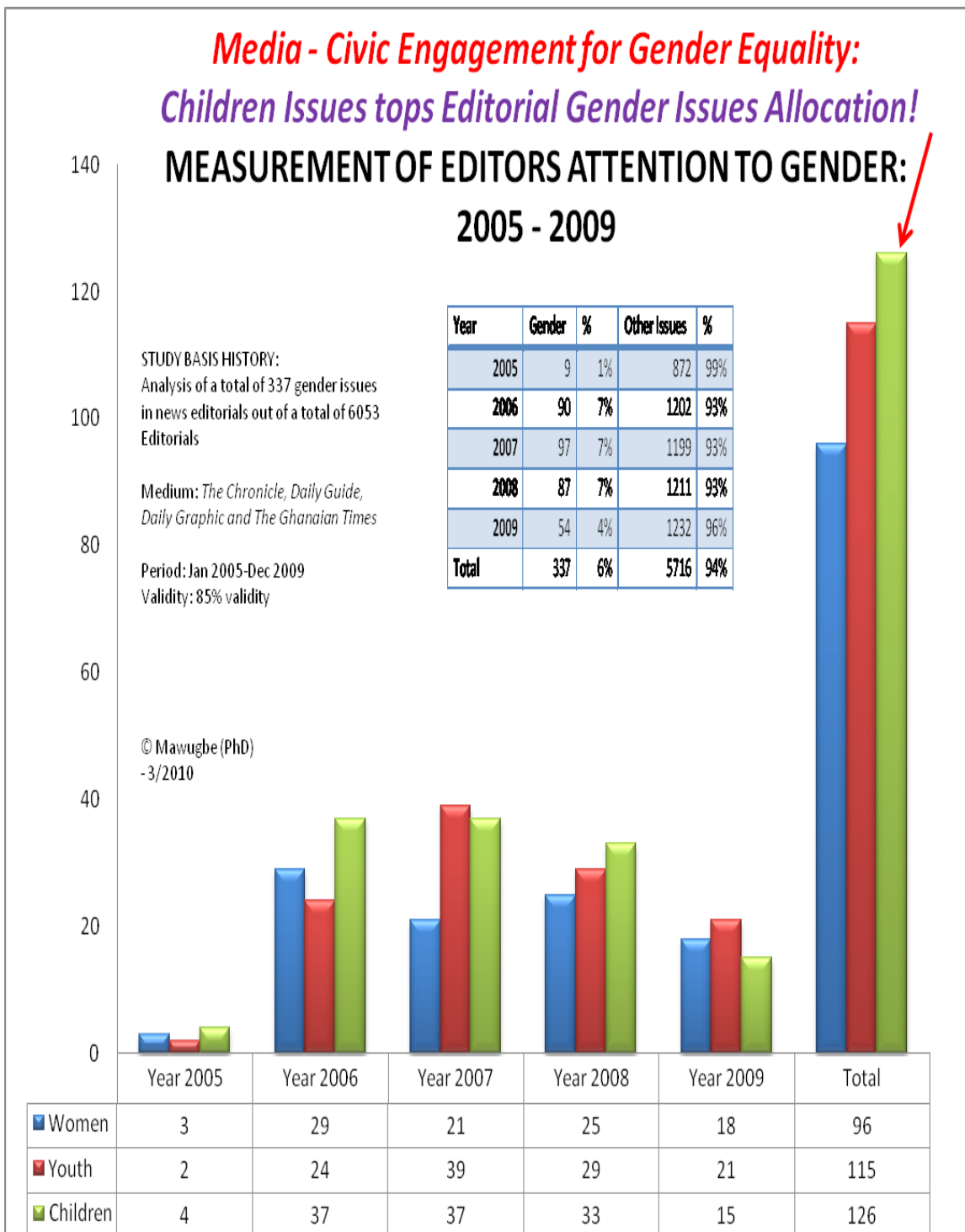
Interestingly, from the period of monitoring, no coverage on women was ever pegged at or exceeded 3%; coverage ranges from 0.3% to 2.2%. See Table 1, Fig. 1.

**Table 1: EDITORIAL SPACE DISTRIBUTION ON GENDER: YEAR 2005 – YEAR 2009**

YEAR	WOMEN	YOUTH	CHILDREN	TOTAL GENDER	%	OTHER ISSUES	%
2005**	3	2	4	9	1%	872	99
2006	29	24	37	90	7%	1202	93
2007	21	39	37	97	7%	1199	93
2008	25	29	33	87	7%	1211	93
2009	18	21	15	54	4%	1232	96
TOTAL : 2005 – 2009	96	115	126	337	6%	5716	94

Note: \*\* Reflects No. of newspapers available to the Researcher in 2005

Figure 1



In relation to measuring overall editorial focus or attention to issues on women from the year 2005 to 2009, out of a total 6053 issues in news editorials, only 1.6% (96 frequency) were given to women compared to issues on Children which rated 2% (126 editorial frequency) and the Youth-1.9% (115 editorial frequency). See Table 2, Fig.2 and Fig. 3.

MEASURING EDITORIAL COMMITMENT TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR GENDER  
EQUITY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE: YEAR 2005 – YEAR 2009

**Table 2: EDITORIAL ANALYSIS: GENDER NEWS SPACE DISTRIBUTION:**

YEAR	WOMEN	%	YOUTH	%	CHILDREN	%	OTHERS	%	TOTAL ISSUES
2005	3	0.3	2	0.2	4	0.4	872	98.9	881
2006	29	2.2	24	1.9	37	2.9	1202	93	1292
2007	21	1.6	39	3	37	2.8	1199	92.5	1296
2008	25	1.9	29	2.2	33	2.5	1211	93.2	1298
2009	18	1.3	21	1.6	15	1.2	1232	95.8	1286
TOTAL	96	1.6	115	1.9	126	2	5716	94.4	6053

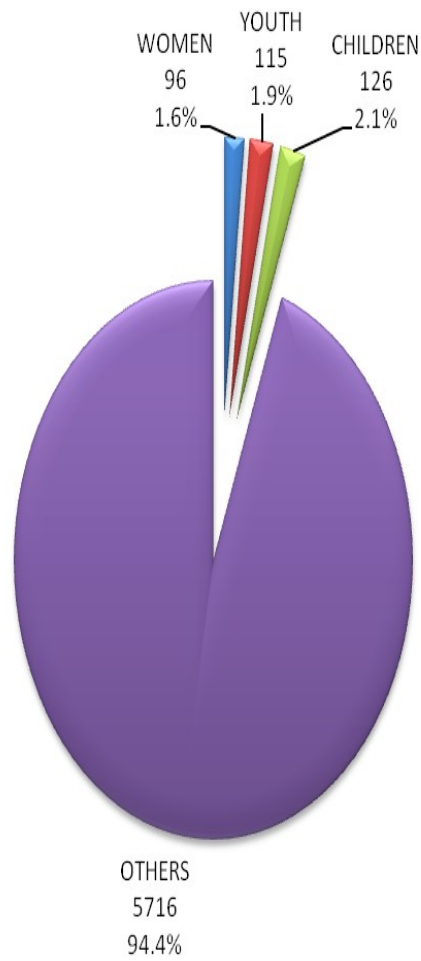
SAMPLED UNITS: DAILY GRAPHIC, THE GHANAIAN TIMES, DAILY GUIDE, THE CHRONICLE

Note: \*\* Reflects No. of newspapers available to the Researcher in 2005

Figure 2

**Media - Civic Engagement for Gender Equality :**  
**Women Given Lowest Coverage in Editorial Gender Stratification -**  
**1.6% Attention!**

**OVERALL FINDINGS ON GENDER: YEAR 2005 - 2009**



STUDY BASIS HISTORY:

Analysis of a total of 337 gender issues in news editorials out of a total of 6053 Editorials

Medium: The Chronicle, Daily Guide, Daily Graphic and The Ghanaian Times

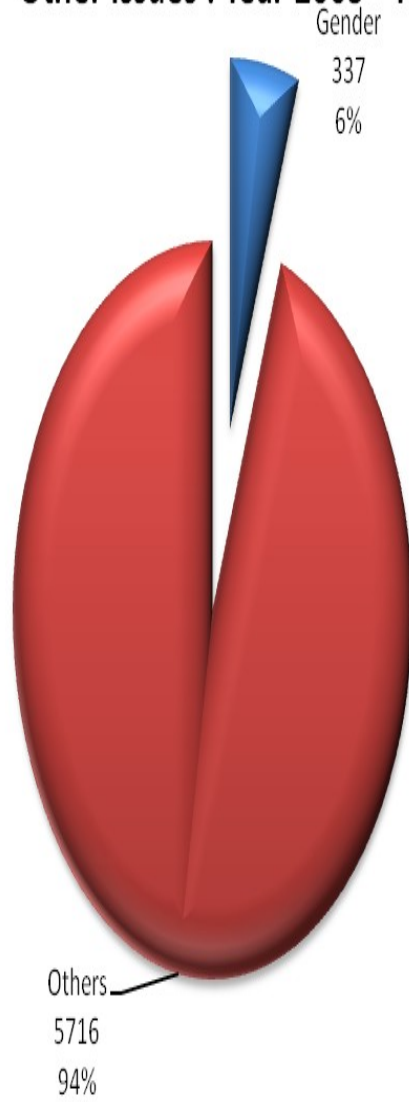
Period: Jan 2005-Dec 2009

Validity: 85% validity

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Figure 1

### Overall Findings on Editorial News Distribution: Gender & Other Issues : Year 2005- Year 2009



STUDY BASIS HISTORY:  
Analysis of a total of 337  
gender issues in news  
editorials out of a total of  
6053 Editorials

Medium: The Chronicle,  
Daily Guide, Daily Graphic  
and The Ghanaian Times  
Period: Jan 2005-Dec 2009  
Validity: 85% validity

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## **DISCUSSIONS AND INTERPRETATION:**

The findings confirmed the research questions 1 and 2 that news editors would marginalize and under represent gender in their editorial coverage. They would give more prominence to other issues (non – gender) than gender issues. The research therefore supports Berger and Gerbner view that the media some times falls short of its plural role by ‘under representing women, the elderly, and the young’ (Gerbner: Berger, 1995).

The results also confirm the assertion that *‘News’ is not the inevitable product of chance events- rather it has been the result of decisions made within news organizations (Epstein, 1981)*. This calls for critical evaluation of editor’s attention and commitment to women / gender issues in editorial coverage.

A total of only 1.6% editorial issues on women recorded from the period 2005 – 2009 compared to 94% editors devoted to other issues shows the media’s “Institutionalized programmatic responses to gender equality commitments and concerns in good governance through citizen engagement”<sup>2</sup> have not been effective. This also reflects the reality of our public sphere, where more attention is given to political issues and human interest stories than gender issues. A study revealed that from 2006 to 2009, the Ghanaian media gave 21% coverage to politics while giving only 2% to gender issues (Mawugbe, 2010: 114). Implicitly, democratic institutions are not creating political platforms for the equity participation of women in Ghana’s democratic process. It is therefore imperative that, a consultative dialogue between news editors, democratic institutions and gender advocacy groups be encouraged. Perhaps, such a platform would render mutual appreciation of gender news values, promotes equal space to women, and participation in governance processes. Also, the findings suggest the media in performing its editorial policy agenda-setting role, did not adequately direct national attention to women in national development. This low trend of editorial

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<sup>2</sup> This is one of the thematic concerns raised by G-rap –Ghana Research & Advocacy programme – to measure institutional commitment and concerns in good governance through citizen engagement, Public Agenda, No.718, Monday Edition, Jan. 25, 2010, pg.11.

focus on women can also be linked to ownership and control of the media within the feminist perspective.

Although, the research did not look at the stereotypical images of women in the media but on coverage distribution, one can argue that, because the media sampled for the study for a period of 2005 to 2009 editorial post holders *were mostly men*, selection of editorial issues were responsibly insensitive to ensuring the equal representation of the multiple voices (women and other gendered issues) in the society. Setting up more alternative media and encouraging women to take up higher positions in media organisations to influence feminists cause would be key in changing lower trends on women coverage.

Also the consistent trend of editorial focus on gender; 7% in 2006, 7% in 2007 and 7% in 2008 which dropped to 4% in 2009 indicates dwindling interest and commitment of editors in gender issues. The total of 1.6% coverage given to women supports feminist theorists' contention that women are 'often marginalized' (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000). This depicts the extent the media has made women in Ghana 'lose their voices and become 'invisible' (Perry, 1994).

The unequal representation of Gender - Women (1.6%) in relation to other issues (94%) from 2005 to 2009 suggests a critical marginalization of women in Ghana's democratic processes. This is corroborated by Voakes, Kapfer, Kurpius and Chern, (1996: 582) that '*a media system that does not reflect the diversity of its audiences remains irrelevant to the system of governance*'.

The effect of the media's attention to other news values than gender (women) is also reflective in Ghana's political system. For instance, as at the first sitting of parliament in 2009, out of a total of 228 parliamentary seats, only 17 (7.4%) seats were occupied by women with the rest by men<sup>3</sup>. Also out of the 70 ministers of state appointed as at 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2010, only 14 are females<sup>4</sup>. The study results could therefore be interpreted as a mirror extension of the parliamentary (governance space) and the executive arm accorded Ghanaian women. As argued by Voakes and associates, one can infer that if the media would give equal representation to reflect the diversity of its citizens

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<sup>3</sup> Ghana - Office of Parliament/ Parliamentary Library

<sup>4</sup> *The Daily Dispatch* newspaper 1<sup>st</sup> March and 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2010 editions , pages 6

(audiences) as in the case of Ghana with a total of 23, 951,519<sup>5</sup> population as estimated by the Ghana Statistical Service, out of which over 51% are women, then women representation in democratic participation and decision making could increase considerably, if not equally.

Also, the media in allotting lesser space to women's issues compared to other issues seems to confirm the relationship between media diversity and democratic representation as stated by Jacklin (1978) that democratic connection between news diversity and governmental efficacy' promotes democratic functions and equal collective representations of gender in good governance since political space and media coverage of issues on women are currently relatively low as a results of low commitment on the part of the media in promoting gender equality in good governance processes . Data available from the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) on women seats in parliament shows women representation in governance processes has reduced by 9 seats in the year 2009 compared to the year 2005. Total women seats in parliament reveals the following : **1993 – 19 seats , 1997 – 19 seats, 2001- 19 seats , 2005- 25 seats and 2009 – 17 seats (now 16 after Chereponi bye- election )** and hence not different from the trend of media coverage of women as depicted in Table 3 below:

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<sup>5</sup> Ghana Statistical Service 2010 Midyear estimate of Ghana's population:  
[www.statsghana.gov.gh](http://www.statsghana.gov.gh)

**Table 3: EDITORIAL COVERAGE DISTRIBUTION ON WOMEN:**

**YEAR 2005 – YEAR 2009**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>OTHER ISSUES</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
2005	3	0.3 %	878	99.7	881
2006	29	2.3 %	1,263	97.8	1292
2007	21	1.6 %	1275	98.3	1296
2008	25	1.9 %	1,273	98.1	1298
2009	18	1.4 %	1268	98.6	1286
<b>TOTAL : 2005 – 2009</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>1.6%</b>	<b>5957</b>	<b>98.4</b>	<b>6053</b>

The GSS data on women’s seats in parliament and the findings on the media coverage trend echo the lesser space given to women in the media and in performing democratic duties.

Critically, the role of the media to ‘mobilize’ (Mandelsohn, 1966; McQuail, 2000: 79) all divergent views and effect ‘integration’ (Stamm, 1985; Jackson, 1971; Cox & Morgan, 1973 and Mulphy, 1976 : McQuail, 2000) of gender (women ) in all governance processes is a stronger tool in upholding gender issues. Again, the mobilization and integration role of the media would propel gender representation into a higher national focus since the media’s ability to mobilize ‘plural voices’ for equal political access and democratic equity has always been effective in every democratic contestation. In a study conducted by *Journalists for Human Rights* on gender in Ghana in mid -2007 to look at Ghanaian women in journalism, and reported by Doug Murray in a feature “Empowering women in Ghana” in the *WORD magazine* “found female enrollment in Ghana’s top three journalism schools is in excess of 50%”. In terms of full time journalists, “the ratio of women to men is most balanced in the television field – 45%, 33% women radio journalists nationwide and 30% of women print journalists”. ([www.wordmag.com](http://www.wordmag.com), retrieved June, 28, 2010). However, this statistics has not reflected in the editorial coverage of women as indicated by the findings because gender advocates and policy makers have not explored effectively the mobilization role of the

media. Therefore to reform existing media and creating social media that can adequately provide more space to women as well as encourage participation of women in democratic governance as being advocated, gender equality should always be in tandem with equal social mobilization where the media should be used to mobilize all relevant stakeholders relentlessly.

It is therefore worth inferring from the above discussion that, society needs to recognize the relationship between gender media space and gender governance space contestations since media would continue to act as mirror reflection of human social realities and subsequently reveal the level of equity political space contested in the media and other political spaces.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Content of news editorials transmit ideological views of media houses. Therefore, it is the content that inspires, involves and causes a change. An important question however, is whether editorials present equal level of diverse voices in terms of sources and viewpoints in the society. The findings revealed that editorial content does not necessarily promote equal representation and divergent views. Especially as noted in this study, women voices were relegated to the periphery of editorial news spaces.

The findings also support critics who argue and assume that participation of women in news making and diversity of genders either in sources or in news personnel would affect the necessary recognition and equal space to women since the editors who managed the selected newspapers used for the study were mostly men. It is however worth exploring this view further in future studies.

The fact is, editors continue to mention women as content unit but do not treat women issues as central news themes. It is therefore imperative to induce a change in this direction.

My contention is that without a conscious effort by gender advocates to mobilize editorial teams and media personnel in supporting gender equality, the cause of promoting equal voices for women would be defeated unless media is oriented towards the merits of equal representation of all social forces in their content selection, projection and views.

## **Study's Limitations:**

Theoretically, this study did not concern itself with media agenda setting attributes measurement in terms of gender stereotypes and clichés but rather considered gender marginalization within the context of news value categories and how it could create 'voiceless' women in the Ghanaian society. It is however worth stating that future studies should attempt to establish the extent of gender stereotypes and clichés embedded in the Ghanaian news editorials, features and news articles. Similar studies could be extended to the electronic media, music and advertisement which would go a long way to buttress the call on gender marginalization in the media.

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