

Women and gender studies paper essay examples

[Sociology](#), [Gender Studies](#)



“ All your words are but to say: you are a woman, and your part is in the house.”

© J. R. R. Tolkien, the Return of the King

Introduction

Media has played an important role in conditioning and shaping the mind of the people in the society. The different forms of social media groomed the perception of individuals regarding many ideologies. One of these ideologies includes the role that men and women play in the society. Social analysts and psychologists call this as gender role.

Gender role distinguishes men and women according to the set of standards that the society assigns . Usually, these set of standards varies depending on culture. However, a common denominator to this is the influence that media has in trying to program the society on what to expect from a particular group.

The interplay of media and social influence lead to a plethora of controversy surrounding gender inequality, stereotyping and gender discrimination. This prompted sociologists to conduct researches to understand the effect of media in gender-based issues particularly in fostering gender inequality. There are also studies done to explore the nature of media on how it can manipulate the society according to its intentions.

Defining Gender Roles

In every society, classifying the population will always include segmentation according to gender. This classification would involve identifying each group by means of gender roles. Gender role is a “ set of social and behavioral

masculine or feminine norms or expectations from males or females in a particular culture or social group”.

Individuals are born with a specific gender role. This is something innate to every individual which comes like a package deal to one's sexuality. We are expected to adhere and personify what is expected of us otherwise we will be socially ostracized. Ostracization usually develops stereotyping and gender discrimination.

Given this definition of gender role, it can be assumed that the image the public has about a particular gender is dictated by the society. In other words, in a male-dominated culture like Japan and Singapore, male individuals will always have the upper-hand and women will always be type-casted as subordinate to men. It also goes to say that men are expected to do better, perform better and achieve more than their female counterparts. So for a culture experiencing male dominance, men will always be portrayed as professionals, reputable and strong while women would only have secondary roles such as being a housewife, subordinate to men, plain and in need of rescuing. This is where media has a significant role to play.

The Nature of Media

Mass Media can be a powerful tool which can influence and oftentimes manipulate social perceptions. Since it has now been able to reach a bigger audience considering that there are several available platforms for its use, media has now doubled its effect. Not only does news and information travel faster; its influence also covers a wider scope.

The absence of a definitive classification that would contextualize media is not enough to weaken its effects in shaping the minds of people. In fact,

history would testify in the pivotal role that media could play. There have been lots of historical events in the past that were made possible because of the influences of Mass Media. Mass Media is always at the heart of major events like elections, revolutions and other historic events. The recently concluded inauguration of President Barrack Obama justifies the validity of this claim. Different local and foreign media outlets covered the said event, and have also contributed by exposing the president's proposed platform before the elections.

Mass Media would normally click for a society where majority of the members would prefer to establish a social norm rather than to engage in an unsystematic way of interaction. Media has the capacity to influence people. This influence is useful in conditioning the society to believe in an idea, to instill a certain value and fashion a given behavior. This same principle operates in reinforcing patriarchal values in an already patriarchal society. If one is to observe the different advertisements in Asian countries like Japan, the Philippines and Singapore, an audience could very well say that they live in a country that views men as superior than women. 9 out 10 commercials aired on primetime show signs of patriarchal values . According to a similar study, men usually portray the role of doctors, businessmen, lawyers and athletes in advertisements. It is also not new in these countries for men to have the best airtime in television and broadcast programs . This goes to show that media can be very biased in opening opportunities for both sexes.

Advertising and Gender Roles

In a perfume advertisement made by Christian Dior, it is noticeable how both images had been presented differently. In the advertisement of Dior's

perfume for men, the male model from the picture was dressed so elegantly with a gorgeous coat and tie. The model exudes confidence, dignity and professionalism. In contrast to the advertisement of the same product line of Dior, (i. e. perfume for women) the female model was pictured as a sexual object. Basing it from the storyline of both advertisements, the female model shows a slightly lowered characterization and social status.

Closely evaluating the purpose of advertisement, it can be achieved that ads are groomed at promoting and encoring commercialism. This is the main objective of ads. However, we have to take into consideration that for marketing value, ads must cater to a particular audience and exude an appeal that could be viewed positively by people regardless of their cultural background or ideologies. Advertising agencies therefore, conduct valuable and credible surveys about their target market and scrutinize their preferences before conceptualizing on what will be contained in their final advertisement campaigns. An advertisement that will run opposite to the flow of social norms and standards will not sell and will most likely receive criticisms from the members of society in general. Advertising agencies should be very careful when dealing with a multinational market as discrimination, racism, and other socially-sensitive issues could trigger mixed reactions.

Therefore, what are social norms and how do they affect gender roles? Social norms are defined as sets of standards that a culture or a society has that determine what is acceptable or not. If one would try to relate how social norms and gender roles could connect with one another, it is this set of standards that gives meaning to what behaviors are acceptable for a

particular gender. Specifically, in a male dominated culture, the social norm is that men are supposed to be the stronger gender. Men are expected to rule over his household, provide for their needs, and hold a profession and display superiority and machismo. Contrary to women, society has very low expectations of them. In such a culture, women are just limited to work inside the house, waiting for orders, cleaning, doing motherly duties and being submissive to their husbands. In addition, women would also be seen portraying common roles of mothers, housewives, assistants, prostitutes and vagrant which will not been typically seen among men.

Stereotyping may also be a significant issue. Some advocates of a male dominated culture would argue that the feminists are just being too sensitive about this issue. According to them there is no point arguing a creative presentation of media calling it freedom of expression, or a creative pursuit of the plot. However, they failed to realize that there is a subtle implication of these roles being aired. Consequently, the public are being conditioned to believe that men are superior to women.

Media and Conditioning

The principles embodied in Ivan Pavlov's Classical Conditioning apply the same principles in the advertisements that showcase the stereotyping of gender in various advertisements. In Pavlov's study, he mentioned the importance of constantly exposing the subject to a stimulus which would then lead to an elicited response. This response will evidently become a reflex because the mind has already formed connections between gender and equality among males and females, which again is due to frequent exposure. By closely analyzing the mechanism involved in Pavlov's

experiment, we can arrive at the idea that exposing the public in a particular scenario where men are regarded as superior to women, and presenting this to them on a regular basis (in this case in the form of commercials and advertisements) will also result in a similar behavior. The public will be conditioned to believe that men have a distinct role to play in the society and women are just secondary to men. Both mechanisms have the same sets of variables to illicit the same response, a conditioned response.

Stereotyping lives a negative connotation. It is putting a group in a box, in this case women and expecting them to behave only according to what is expected of them. Society has been guilty of practicing this despite knowing its implications. Most of the time women are the most likely victims of stereotyping because they are the ones who are usually weak and dependent to men, a societal model which started a long time ago. Although on certain parts of the world, women have successfully escaped the clutches of stereotyping in gender roles, there are still signs that they had not been completely triumphant. In the case of the Philippines and Singapore, both countries had been enjoying nearly equal rights between men and women. In fact, two female presidents had already taken the highest position in the Philippines in the person of the late Corazon C. Aquino and the very recent was Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. However, despite this, there are still indications suggesting that stereotyping women is still present in a country where women rights and women group are very active and vigilant against any forms of gender rights violation.

On the other hand, despite the success of giving equal rights to men and women, we can still see how media and the people behind these

stereotyping propagandas are working their way into influencing the public to believe lies of the past . Again we have to remember that media is a very potent tool to persuade, influence and motivate people. If a company wants the people to wear a certain cut of fabric or to sport a certain type of hairstyle, all the designers have to do is get the right advertising agency, hire the right models and endorsers and allow several days to run its campaign on television. Before you know it everyone are going the mall and salon, buying the latest fashion being advertised and asking for one particular haircut.

Therefore, if the most influential people in the society would like to dictate a certain behavior, all they have to do is to resort to media and go through the same processes as a typical designer or endorser would do. Motivating the people in this day and age no longer involves a tedious process of going the rounds of house-to-house campaigns, nor would need massive information dissemination strategies. One single avenue will be enough to cover all the tracks that all these machinations would contain, and this is through media .

Conclusion

After reviewing media and its participation in determining gender role, it only shows how both are closely interrelated. On one hand, we saw how powerful media had grown to become in the past and has now established itself as the leader in shaping the people's minds. Over the years, media had taken a laid back role of simply serving as an avenue for promoting fashion and fads. However, as time progressed, media has become such an influential medium that could motivate and persuade people. It can also reverse the public's opinion on certain matters.

We have gender roles and social norms. Culture and society basically has been influential in determining the sets of standards that dictates the role and expectations of a certain gender class. Society has been responsible for giving out indirect orders that people has to follow and suggesting what is acceptable and what is not. Going against these standards would mean that one is becoming defiant, thus eventually being considered a social menace that is out to destroy the presence of continuous peace and social order.

In a male dominated culture, we can see how society and media has been significantly responsible in shaping the mindset of people. It is very visible in their advertisements and in how the roles in their programs had been fashioned. Men are always being portrayed as the stronger sex. They are always given roles that exemplify their male machismo while women merely serves as a secondary role, submissive and subordinate. For example, men are given roles of doctors, lawyers and heroes in a story, while women are type casted as housewives, prostitutes, assistants or damsels in need of male rescuing.

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