

Media and the reinforcement of gender media essay



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Marshall McLuhan once said, "The medium is the message". The mass media is so ingrained into our everyday lives that it makes it an undeniable influence of our lives. The media is the fundamental cultural influence with its role of a "storyteller". Its content helps to shape beliefs, attitudes, values and expectations of users. Ranging from commercials on television to advertisements on newspapers, the mass media has penetrated and spilled its influence on us. It has aggrandized our desires for self-gratification via the creation of the epitome of beauty and perfection- Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie and Jennifer Lopez. People flock to worship their idols, acting and behaving to what they have learnt from the media. However, it is important to pause for a moment and examine the messages the media have sent. Critics lament that the content media portrays is materialistic and superficial. These messages are lacklustre and only serve to enforce certain gender stereotypes in society. The media is the key contributor that reinforces gender stereotypes in society today. This will be illustrated by how advertisements, music industry, and movies and television networks that continuously reinforce the notion of gender stereotypes.

Advertisements and commercials are the pillars of gender stereotypes in society today. Undoubtedly, there is a huge emphasis on consumerism in the global market. Projecting current trends and fashion, the media have heavily emphasized on gender stereotypes such as that of an image of an "ideal body" or what constitutes a "perfect women" in order to persuade more consumers to buy their products. Females are more likely to be objectified than men (Kim, 2012). Sexist ads normalize sexism and violence against women. These messages are often similar in all ads, and underline women as

objectified visual media. Sexist advertisements tend to depict women clad in sexy outfits and behaving in suggestive manners. They intentionally neglect the false notions of gender marginalization which they are portraying and instead, constantly put these notions in the spotlight. For example, Dolce and Gabbana have often resorted to the glorifying of sex in their advertisements. They have even gone to the extent of depicting a scene calling forth gang rape and violence against women in one of their print advertisements. In other ads, they stress on typical societal gender roles of women accommodating to men's beck and call. Madonna, in D&G's ad, was seen to be scrubbing floors on all fours in a provocative position. These sexist advertisements only serve to enforce gender stereotypes in society by intentionally placing women in their typical gender roles. Men are also increasingly stereotyped by the media. It is not a surprise to see men with six-packs as having the ideal body types. Abercrombie and Fitch is a typical example. It has often made use of topless men in six-packs with jeans slung extremely low. Similarly, H&M has resorted to the same tactics by portraying David Beckham in a manly manner with six-packs to advertise for their newly introduced briefs. These advertisements operate on the false assumptions of gender roles and behavior and will continuously perpetuate gender stereotypes in society. The media has such a powerful influence that it shapes the beliefs and perceptions of individuals. Young people, both men and female spend up to nearly 11 hours of media consumption a day (Star, 2012). Media creates consciousness and if the content shown is often about the objectification of women or men, there is no way progress can be made to relieve gender stereotypes (Star, 2012).

Critics may, however, argue that advertisements merely reflect society's wants, and it is not the media that had perpetuated the notion of gender stereotypes. The responsibility lies on the consumers to check and keep themselves aware of what they are being exposed to. Also, consumers are the one who will determine what the media would show. Advertisements merely translate human beings' desires and put them on screen. It is the innate nature of human beings to desire and strive for a perfect or ideal body. Stiletto heels are an illustration of women's admiration and attraction for longer legs. They allure feminist outlook and injects a dosage of confidence into women. This is especially so for shorter women who desire the height of taller girls. Another illustration is L'Oreal's anti-wrinkle cream featuring Oscar-winning actress Rachel Weisz with digitally-enhanced photographs of a perfect complexion. Although the advertisement came under scrutiny, there can be no hint of any drop in the profits of L'Oreal's products. Thus, despite how the media portrays such unrealistic images, it has little effect in reinforcing stereotypes as consumers have the right to choose whatever content they want. It will be inherently biased and myopic if we dismiss how consumers themselves have chosen these trends for their personal thirst for perfection. However, there is a need to keep in view that the media is still the main culprit that tweaks people's perceptions. For example, while it is normal for boys to associate with male pursuits such as racing cars, action heroes and contact sports, body image is an increasingly worrying factor (Bates, 2012). Boys from as young as five are starting to believe that masculinity is according to what they view on the media, raising concerns that children are increasingly conforming to body-image stereotypes (Bates, 2012). Hence, without media's constant bombardment of <https://assignbuster.com/media-and-the-reinforcement-of-gender-media-essay/>

stereotypes, it can be easily arguable that people's so-called 'rights' to pursue their preference is after all, a product of media's influence.

The music industry has also continued to plague society with its perpetuation of gender stereotypes. Lyrics and music videos degrade women, and features gender representations in a negative light. Female characters are often skimpily dressed and have attention is often drawn on their curves and revealing body parts. These female characters are often dancing to male dancers and singers in a suggestive manner. Songs center attention on attractiveness and sex, again suggesting how these features are valued over other aspects. Britney Spears is perhaps the best representation for the bad reputation that mainstream 'pop' has today. With her provocative music videos and lyrics such as "Womanizer", Britney has instilled gender stereotypes into the minds of people unknowingly. Another perfect example will be "S&M" by Rihanna. The song promotes violence in sexual behaviours, which can be a cause of concern. A report indicated that young men aged between 15 and 19 who followed closely to the traditional views of manhood in the US had a higher possibility in engaging in substance abuse, violence and unsafe sex practices (Songa, 2011). The song lyrics women at risk of being labelled and packed into stereotypical roles; labels such as 'doll', 'baby' and 'sweetie' infantilise women (Bates, 2012). Such images and lyrics reinforce the notion of gender stereotypes into society and normalize these false ideas into one.

Others disagree and defends media, stating that the media had instead, assisted to educate and correct the mindsets of gender stereotypes.

Infomercials and news keep people aware and educated of gender
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stereotypes. This had in turn, improved the situation of gender stereotypes in society today. It will be sweeping to argue that all forms of media are unsubstantial as there are evidences of media achieving success in educating the public as well. Rap songs, such as “ Where is the love” by Black Eyed Peas, have spoken up against stereotyping and discriminating. Female singers have also stood forward and protested against such stereotypes. The most evident being Gloria Gayner’s “ I will survive” and Kelly Clarkson’s “ What doesn’t kill you”. These songs lift women out of gender stereotypes and portray them as capable individuals who can be as strong and capable as men. Another illustration is Dove’s Real Beauty campaign on Facebook that allows users to substitute ads that reinforce negative message with positive ones. The campaign assisted in removing more than 210 million impressions of feel-bad ads and replaced them with positive messages (Edwards, 2012). This example shows how advertisements can posit positive messages into consumers and assist in improving gender stereotypes. It is hence inherently biased to state that the media has only served the purpose of reinforcing gender stereotypes in society today. There is no doubt there are positive role models around that educate the public on such issues. However, the primary message that the media have shown is still that of sex sells. The media not only objectifies women, but also capitalizes on their insecurities (Diani, 2004). This continuous effort of the media will only remove all previous efforts to alleviate gender stereotypes, and instead worsen it in society today.

Movies and television networks are equally guilty in instilling gender stereotypes into society. They portray women as the biologically weaker sex

that needs assistance in whatever they do. Hollywood's films often center on clichéd storylines such as a damsel in distress and a prince coming to her rescue in a white horse. Women are deemed as inferior and weaklings who lack the ability to do anything. Other contents shown on television programmes are those that depict women as shallow and superficial individuals. They reinforce gender stereotypes by showing how women will only be attracted to wealthy and good-looking males instead of intelligent and ugly ones. One such example is that of "Beauty and the Geek" in Australia. In the show, women who are often dumb but have voluptuous figures despise the intellectual and ugly men. Disney movies have also reinforced stereotypes in children since young. Girls will have to play with dolls and dressed in Pink in order to look like princesses while boys will have to play with tanks or cars to be deemed as manly. Such images condone gender stereotypes and worsen the situation. With the constant bombardment of these images, it will be hard to swim out of the gender roles the media has laid out for us. Media's limited and demeaning portrayals of women and girls make it difficult for them to ignore such influence to empower themselves (Star, 2012). Hollywood movies are also often producing large amounts of negative stereotypes depicting men as losers (Crouse, 2012). The typical male characters are often incompetent and confused by basic human activities. These movies and images tend to reinforce gender stereotypes in society and will continue to do so for the sake of higher profits. In a society where the media is a form of persuasive force in shaping cultural norms, the collective message sent to all people is still the typical gender roles laid out for them, and not their true ability to

handle issues. This perpetuation of gender stereotypes will continue to plague society and stagnant the situation.

Hence, the media, regardless of the different forms, is still the main culprit in reinforcing gender stereotypes today. Undeniably, there have been positive role models who have assisted in ameliorating the situation; however, such positive values will be overshadowed by the constant bombardment of glitzy display of images and sounds emphasizing the message of: Sex sells. There are little chances that the media will stop exploiting on people's insecurities, and they will continue to sell consumers with such messages to maximize their profits. Therefore, the media is and will be the key contributor to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes in society.