

Women and Media

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I. INTRODUCTION

“There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women.”

-Kofi Annan

Media's affect on Women Since the beginning of media history, it has been empowering and limiting woman in many ways. Some of these ways are how woman today view their own body image, what stereotypes the media puts on women, and how these things affect women's health. The media has been altering the way everyone see themselves and each other. They can also change the way we dress, look, and even the way we act. The media is the largest source of stereotypical misinformation on earth, and this provokes others to stereotype as well. Journalism is changing, as is the role of women in the workplace, but the two are not always evolving in harmony. Women are better educated and encouraged to achieve at work- just as journalism intensifies, jobs become tougher and the economic pressures become greater. The digital revolution means journalists can work from anywhere, but what is sometimes viewed as the 'electronic cottage' may also become the 'electronic cage'. As news cycles shorten and demands increase for a 24/7 multi-media presence, so the nature of the work has become more challenging. Meanwhile women still continue to shoulder a disproportionate burden in the home (either because society expects it or they want to) which makes things harder to manage if the workplace becomes more demanding. Media within our society constantly degrades women and sends negative messages about the ways in which women should be treated; women are becoming objectified in the sense they are viewed as objects with little value. The media, which seems to endlessly show women as sexual objects, has the capability of limiting a woman's potential and damaging their self worth. More often than not the media depicts the way people go about their daily life. People look at the media to determine how they should dress, act and in some cases even how they should perform sexually.

II. IRRESPONSIBLE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

“The foolish human,” Lord Krishna preached in the Bhagvad-Gita (holy book of Hindus), “who forcefully suppresses his or her sexual desire is a hypocrite.” Between the two genders, does not this saying of Krishna prove true of females. Women are reduced to the status of objects due to the insistence of male dominance and desire in our patriarchal world. They are denied full expression of humanity if, as Lord Krishna preached, feeling desire is a very human “thing.” Society employs many mechanisms that perpetuate patriarchy and maintain the sexual imbalance in our world.

Research indicates that exposure to images of thin, young, air-brushed female bodies can be linked to depression, loss of self-esteem and the development of unhealthy eating habits in women and girls. Twenty years ago the average model weighed 8 percent less than the average woman, but today's models weight is 23 percent less than the average women. The messages that the media sends to women about thinness, dieting, and beauty tells “ordinary” women that they are always in need of adjustment, and that the female body is an object to be perfected. Emotional abuse is any behavior that is designed to control human beings through the use of fear, humiliation, intimidation, guilt, coercion, or manipulation. Emotional abuse is any kind of abuse that is emotional rather than physical in nature. It can include verbal abuse, constant criticism, put-downs, and constant disapproval.

In 2001, actress Kate Winslet caused controversy over a statement she made about her weight. She told Britain's Radio Times that she needed to lose weight “or I won't work.” She was referring to the nearly fifty pounds she gained during her pregnancy, but fans were still upset over the famously curvy actress's confession. Then, in 2003, Winslet shocked fans and critics alike when she expressed her distaste for GQ Magazine's digitally slimmed pictures of her (Tauber, 2001). The 1920s were a revolutionizing decade in which women flourished from housewives to being independent when the 19th amendment was finally passed and endorsed by congress. The 20s produced a new generation of women who were at liberty to get bob length haircuts, smoke Camels, and skip the housewife role if they chose to do so. It seemed as if the United States finally live up to its name as “the land of the free,” where women were allowed to vote, followed by a significant increase in the number of college degrees earned by women and women advancing in the workforce.

III. SAD TRUTHS ABOUT WOMEN IN MEDIA

Here's a list of some of the most depressing insights from the report, which draws on 49 studies of women across media platforms. (This is why some of the numbers are from 2012-2013, even though this is the report on 2014 and 2015).

1. The news industry still hasn't achieved anything that resembles gender equality. Women are on camera only 32% of the time in evening broadcast news, and write 37% of print stories news stories. Between 2013 and 2014, female bylines and other credits increased just a little more than 1%. At the New York *Times*, more than 67% of bylines are male.

2. Men still dominate "hard news." Even though the 2016 election could be the first time a woman presidential candidate gets a major party nomination, men report 65% of political stories. Men also dominate science coverage (63%), world politics coverage (64%) and criminal justice news (67%). Women have lost traction in sports journalism, with only 10% of sports coverage produced by women (last year, it was 17%). Education and lifestyle coverage were the only areas that demonstrated any real parity.

3. Opinions are apparently a male thing. Newspaper editorial boards are on average made up of seven men and four women. And the overall commentators on Sunday morning talk-shows are more than 70% male.

4. Hollywood executives are still overwhelmingly white and male. Studio senior management is 92% white and 83% male.

5. There's bad news for actresses and minorities. Women accounted for only 12% of on-screen protagonists in 2014, and 30% of characters with speaking parts. There are also persistent racial disparities: White people are cast in lead roles more than twice as often as people of color, and white film writers outnumber minority writers 3 to 1. In 17% of films, no black people had speaking parts.

6. Women are losing traction behind the scenes. Women accounted for 25% of writers in 2013-2014, down from 34% the previous year. Women make up only 23% of executive producers (down from 27%) and 20% of show creators (down from 24%). For the 250 most profitable films made in 2014, 83% of the directors, producers, writers, cinematographers and editors are guys.

7. The stereotypes persist even in love. Black men are the most likely to be shown in relationships (68% of male characters in relationships are black) while Asian men are the least likely to have girlfriends on screen (29%). Latino characters of both genders were the most likely to be hyper-sexualized on-screen.

8. Latino characters are particularly under-represented. Latinos are 17% of the U.S. population and buy 25% of movie tickets, but have less than 5% of speaking roles in films. There are no Latino studio or network presidents, and from 2012 to 2013, 69% of all maids were played by Latina actresses.

But it's not *all* bad news. There's been some progress made. For example, at the *New York Times* Book Review, 52% of reviews in 2014 were written by women. At the *Chicago Sun-Times*, 54% of the bylines were female, and 53% of contributors to the Huffington Post are women. And in the top grossing films of 2013, the number of movies in which teen girls were hyper-sexualized dropped from around 31% to less than 19%.

IV. EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN

The exploitation of women in mass media is the use or portrayal of women in the mass media (such as television, film and advertising) to increase the appeal of media or a product to the detriment of, or without regard to, the interests of the women portrayed, or women in general. Feminists and other advocates of women's rights have criticized such exploitation. The most often criticized aspect of the use of women in mass media is sexual objectification, but dismemberment can be a part of the objectification as well. Pro-feminist cultural critics such as Robert Jensen and SutJhally accuse mass media and advertising of promoting the objectification of women to help promote goods and services. Clothing designer Calvin Klein has himself been a critic of the use of women in advertising, having said -

"Jeans are about sex. The abundance of bare flesh is the last gasp of advertisers trying to give redundant products a new identity."

The overt use of sexuality to promote breast cancer awareness, through fundraising campaigns like "I Love Boobies" and "Save the Ta-tas", angers and offends breast cancer survivors and older women, who are at higher risk of developing breast cancer. Women who have breast cancer say that these advertising campaigns suggest that having sexy breasts is more important than saving their lives, which devalues them as human beings. Additionally, the sexual objectification of women in film has a detrimental effect on girls and young women. Research shows that when girls had extended exposure to films in which female super heroes were dressed in over-sexualized costumes, they became more aware of their own body competence. Additionally, the exposure impacted their view of the female gender and female roles.

CONCLUSION

Women have been fighting for the right to be equal members of society for centuries. In the past women were treated as second class citizens and didn't have the same rights as men did. Women later lead a movement to change these ways. Although some drastic changes did come about from these movements, equality wasn't fully attained. In this day and age, equality between men and women still hasn't been achieved and the media is to blame for that. For decades, the media has dominated society's views and perspectives of others.

"It is unreasonable to expect that people will change their behavior easily when so many forces in the social, cultural, and physical environment conspire against such change".

-Institute of Medicine.

References

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