

THE MEDIA AND GENDER STEREOTYPES

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN THE CREATION OF GENDER STEREOTYPES IN
AMERICA

A literature review submitted as a requirement to obtain the degree of professional in modern
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Abstract

This document is a critical -descriptive literature review, whereby try to encompass the beginning and importance of gender stereotypes inside the mass media, besides to identify the role and the use in America. Likewise the ideas are supported with sources and researches with evident and considerable results. Afterwards, the purpose of this document is to create in the readers a clear and concise idea, the reason why the stereotypes are common in the people thoughts and how this have an influence in their preferences, and beliefs to obtain opinions about a specific subject. This paper makes a contrast among gender stereotypes since these are the most remarkable and influential stereotypes in the human beings' beliefs and behaviors.

Key words: Gender, mass media, media influence, media perception, media's role, stereotype, gender stereotypes.

Resumen

Este documento es una revisión literaria crítica descriptiva, la cual busca dar a conocer parte del inicio y la importancia de los estereotipos de géneros dentro de los medio de comunicación, además de identificar su rol y manejo en américa. Así mismo las ideas se conectan con fuentes de investigaciones y referencias que ya han tenido resultados notables. Posteriormente se quiere generar en los lectores una idea clara y concisa de porque los estereotipos son más comunes en las ideas de las personas y cómo influyen en sus preferencias e ideales para tener una opinión sobre algún tema en específico. Finalmente se quiso hacer un contractes en los estereotipos de género, ya que son más notables e influyentes de lo que creemos.

Palabras claves: Genero, medios de comunicación, influencia en la media, percepción de la media, rol de la media, estereotipo, estereotipos de género.

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of this literature review is the role of media in the creation of gender stereotypes in America. Firstly, our research is going to explain the concept of stereotype and some principles about how they appear in the human mind, then the definition of gender stereotypes and some examples of them in media. Secondly we are going to approach the conception of media, its impact nowadays, the difference between the traditional and new media and some of its characteristics. Thirdly, we are going to focus on the role of media in stereotyping, discussing about appearance of stereotypes in media through the “star system” which explains the beginning of the stars in Hollywood in the 50’s and some psychological facts of social influence in media and the reinforcement. Finally we are going to give conclusions of our academic research.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In recent years, gender stereotypes have influenced notoriously the human behavior in different ways. It is important the assimilation of the media's power in the creation of stereotypes regarding the effects in human beings in different contexts. This research is focus on the role of media in the creation of gender stereotypes in America.

According to the consideration of Media Effects, Gorham, (2010) stated:

Given the number of mass media messages we consume on a daily basis, the potential for negative cumulative effects seems great. Each representation of a member of a social group could potentially trigger the stereotype of that group, giving viewers an example that helps reinforce the majority's dominance. (p. 100)

From our point of view, we agree with Gorham's explanation of the importance of media's messages influencing stereotyping due to the negative accumulative effects, considering that in attempt for persuade, shape, inform and entertain media take advantages of many studies and resources to get into people's mind without their awareness, as Gorham, (2010) also said "stereotypes can influence our processing and understanding of media messages even when we're not aware of it" (p.100).

Based on this premise, emerge the importance of our research; as students of modern languages, we have noticed how media sell us stereotypes, which affect in our cultural learning process. Thus, as researchers, we expect to understand some facts about media such as how some of their features are helpful to boots gender stereotypes in the American society, causing in some cases prejudices, discrimination, inequality and in the worst of the sceneries violence and besides the existence of some specific consumer more likely to be influenced by media, due to the persuasive power of the media and its entertainment's function.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most of the time when people watch advertisements, films or musicals videos, they do not notice that they are getting many different messages from the media. Some of those messages are stereotypes such; the imaginary that blond girls are not as intelligent as the other girls or the common social classification in school, which says that exist five types of students: the nerd, the athlete, the princess, the criminal, and the apathetic. Although these stereotypes come from the North American culture, probably they spread to the whole American continent, due to the similarities among people's behavior in each country. Taking this into account, emerge the necessity to know about the role of media in gender stereotype.

Stereotypes concepts

Firstly, it is necessary to board two main definitions to have a better understanding of the topic to discuss. It is often heard the word stereotype, but do we genuinely understand the meaning of the word? Stereotypes are the result of a mental classification based in cultural context, Jost and Hamilton (2005) found that "Categorization is a fundamental process that gives rise to stereotyping and prejudice" (p. 1). This means that human brain tends to categorize information and often generalizing concepts that not in all cases are true. Kurylo (2015) stated, "Stereotypes associate members of a group with one or more characteristics attributed to that group" (p. 1). In other words, human brain takes what probably is an individual characteristic and turns it into a general appreciation defining the entire group. An example of that is the stereotype that all women are talkative or terrible drivers, but the fact is that some women speak more or drive bad than others and it does not mean that all women are the same.

The Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2010) give a more concise definition:

Stereotypes are beliefs adopted in advance; concerning characteristics of an individual, a group or an object and emphasizing the fact of not taking into account

the individual traits. Stereotypes are simplifications, of social origin, persistent, subjective, being transmitted from generation to generation. (p.5)

In addition it is useful to refer to McGarty, Yzerby & Spears (2002), who mentioned that stereotypes have three principles, the first principle is stereotypes as aids to explanations, which means that stereotypes are a support for people make sense of a situation; the second is that stereotypes are energy-saving devices, which implies that they should reduce the effort in the people; and thirdly, stereotypes share group beliefs, which explains that stereotypes should be formed in line with views or norms accepted by social groups where the perceiver belongs to. (p. 2)

Emphasizing in the second principle stereotypes as shortcuts, McGarty, Yzerby, and Spears (2002) state that stereotypes save energy treating people as a groups of members, because it helps us to ignore a lot of diverse and detailed information; that is associated with the individuals, and as individual people we have limited capacities to process all the information; which leads people to take shortcuts and to adopt partial and erroneous perceptions of the world, giving as a result stereotypes, which are taking as aids to misunderstanding and that are seen as rigid and distorted mental structures (p.4). Added to that Dyer (n.d) said “The word 'stereotype' is today almost always a term of abuse” (para.1). This effect is caused, owing to most of the time stereotypes are false or negative and pejorative, thanks to stereotypes are based in prejudice or because they justify or explain behaviors considered incorrect by the society.

Although exist many types of stereotypes regarding ethnicity, religion, profession, nationality and gender. We are going to pursue the gender stereotypes in the next construct.

Gender stereotypes definition

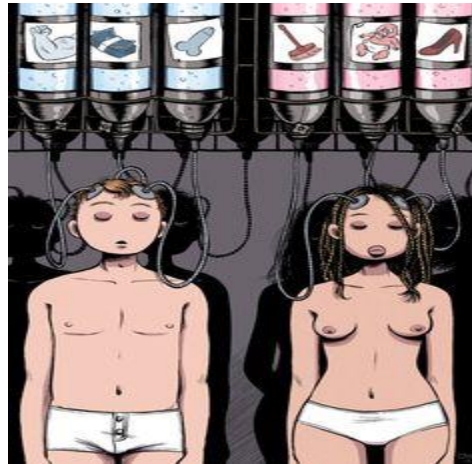


Image 1. Image of gender stereotypes. Source: (2012)

Analyzing the media's content, we have noticed that gender stereotypes are the most common in media, such as the ones in the previous image associate men with the blue color while women with the pink, men with strength, and women with weakness; men as a sexual human being, and women as keen of shoes, and so on; according to Bailey and Castello (2012) gender stereotypes “are used for categorizing men and women, the masculine and the feminine”. (p.4). they mentioned that is a classification of men and women into a target group who has a combination of attributes or qualities to be expressed as Models in society with different behaviors.

However, those qualities and attributes in women and men make part of the media, because mass media has the responsibility to create conceptions through TV, Radio, Internet, and so on to transmit the information and to contribute how men and women should seem and should be a model that follows stereotypes, and how they should behave; on top of that media propagate images and commercials with messages to idealize stereotypical models.

An example of gender stereotypes in media regarding to how should be men and women attitudes and the characteristics that society expect them to have, are the representations of men as strong and dominant and women weak and submissive, as Wood (1994) mentioned:

Women as victims and sex objects/men as aggressors. A final theme in mediated representations of relationships between women and men is representation of women as subject to men's sexual desires. The irony of this representation is that the very qualities women are encouraged to develop (beauty, sexiness, passivity, and powerlessness) in order to meet cultural ideals of femininity contribute to their victimization. Also, the qualities that men are urged to exemplify (aggressiveness, dominance, sexuality, and strength) are identical to those linked to abuse of women. (p.36)

Our point of view is that women and men most of the times exemplify in the society those characteristics and qualities in different models, because the mass media take charge of representing those attitudes either in films or novels even in advertisements media, also it is because we live in a chauvinism society that always show women as vulnerable victims of violence and men responsible of this abuse. It is helpful to clarify this aspects are linked to models that media create for the society and the qualities has usually been generalized in our daily life in this case.

Regards to women's stereotypes in society, we must express that they are the result of a patriarchal and capitalist system that allow media create a conception of oppression to women, because in the majority of the cases, women are used as a mechanism to attract different industries, such as fashion, advertisement, film, and pornography; considering women as consumers and objects to be exploited as Tamakuwala (2011) gave an explanation of this:

The patriarchal value system itself reveals the truth and oppression of women by class, caste and gender. Media content creates needs primarily and then transforms into consumer needs. Women are treated as consumers and as commodities to be exploited in the advertising television, film and pornographic industry. Women even have faced the marginalization in economic labour force, in the post 1980s globalization women have been regarded as subordinate classes who bears the onslaught of globalization. The media, especially television reinforces the conservative and pathetic role of women as the upholders of a value system by reinforcing consumer culture. (p. 128)

From the researchers' point of view, the author's intention is to analyze in current days the effect of media in the globalization and how women are being oppressed through this stereotype and mainly what is the role of television and advertisements.

Added to that, we must not forget the social conception in the past where men had been considered as a source of income, having a "high -position" workers, whereas women had been shown by society as "low-position" workers responsible to raise children and doing housework, as Wolska (2011) stated, "In the case of gender roles, the media have established the hegemony of males by institutionalizing of male dominance over women. As I mentioned above, men have been perceived as the head of the household and women were mainly housewives. Nowadays the differences between male and female roles are smaller; however mass media still perpetuates traditional gender stereotypes. (Para. 5)

From our perspective, we are controlled by perceptions we had in the past and as a result, media continue promoting nowadays models in TV commercials or TV shows, in radio or internet that reinforce beliefs such as women have to be a prototype of perfect housewives and men family's head, but this should change and we should try to broke these stereotypes, although society follows media's norms.

Media's notions

On the other hand, we had the media's concept, which is usually associated with television, radio, magazines, and so on. With years it became in cornerstone in the development of modern societies and is an important part of people's lives. Straubhaar, LaRose and Davenport (2012) said that a typical American media consumer spend over nine and a quarter hours a day with the media and multiplying that number by the days of year, the result is that people would spend almost five months of the year with media (p.3).

This cipher means that is impossible to deny the quantity of influence and effects that media has nowadays; as Straubhaar, LaRose, and Davenport (2012) stated "New media technologies impact our culture by offering new lifestyles, creating new jobs and eliminating others, shifting media empires, demanding new regulations, and presenting unique new social issues" (p.4). From our point of view, every step taken by the humanity towards the evolution

always is going to be worthy, but it is important to remember that society should be prepared and adapt swiftly to take advantage and make a correct use of the advances, because if we do not; we are always going to be debating about if evolve or create is wrong or what is wrong, are the uses that we give them.

Livesey (2011) referred to mass media as “channels of communication that involve transmitting information in some way, shape or form to large numbers of people (para.2). But those channels of communication evolved thanks to the advances in technology and currently it implies more than Television, radio, books, so the old or traditional media change into the called “New media” Straubhaar, LaRose, and Davenport (2012) give some notions and aspects of the concept:

A term usually associated with interactive media technology, such as the Internet and video games. Although our way of using some new media is not so new and different anymore, such as reading news stories online, old media are acquiring new interactive dimensions, such as voting with our cell phones for our favorite American Idol on TV. The defining aspects of the new media, they are digital, interactive, social, asynchronous, multimedia, and narrow casted. (p. 20-21)

Another important aspect of media is that its features of time, distance and scale facilitate the process of send and receive information bringing down barriers.

Now that we have clarified some concepts, we are going to explain the role of media in gender stereotyping in the following section.

The role of the media in stereotyping

As we mentioned before stereotypes are shared beliefs as McGarty, Yzerbyt and Spears (2002) said they attract less attention when they are not shared by many people, besides they are useful for predicting and understanding the behavior of members of a group (p.5). As an explanation to this meaning McGarty, Yzerbyt and Spears (2002) stated that the people samples from a cultural pool of knowledge, ideologies and social representations, which

produces the commonality views but is through mutual social influence that people's views, became similar to each other (p.6).

It is helpful to add that stereotypes develop through identification and influenced behaviors, McGarty, Yzerbyt and Spears (2002) explained this notion saying that stereotypes are shared by members of groups through the coincidence of common experiences, the existence of shared knowledge in society and mainly because the member of groups act to coordinate their behavior (p.6).

Due to the important role played by the social influence in behavior of people and the fact that stereotypes to be interesting needs to shares and known for individuals, we can say that media is the route through stereotypes spread around the world easily and effectively, causing by its feature of having an unlimited or massive scale, not being just a one-to-one medium, but a many-to-many medium.

In order to have an appropriate understanding of the development of the social influence, it is necessary to mention to Aronson (2007) who explained that exist three responses to social influences. Firstly, compliance, the behavior motivated by desire of gain a reward or avoids a punishment leaded by a component of power, secondly, identification, the individual desire to be like the influencer, due a component of attractiveness, and thirdly internalization of values and beliefs, which motivation is the desire to be right and credibility (p.35-37). According with the author, we can said that is through compliance that people receive reinforcement in behavior, thus we can take the continuous broadcasting in media of gender stereotypes as the reinforcement that allow people to think that what they are associating is correct.

Examples of compliance are the stereotypes that women and men have regarding beauty, which have been reinforced by beauty contest, films and famous stars in media. The identification is one of the most common responses of the consumer; we can identify it through many members of different club of fans, who finds attractiveness in a movie, a singer, books or even a soap opera and adopt a behavior and beliefs from the characters to be part of a group.

Although Jakubowicz (2009) described the public responsibilities of the professional media as “support for the basic social order, respect public mores, provide pictures of the social reality, meet informational needs, provide forum for public expression, act as “watchdog” on powerful, promote social cohesion, provide for cultural/entertainment needs, behave ethically, respect individual and human rights” (p.11). It is by virtue of media’s scale and a conflict of many different interests that is difficult to supervise, analyze and make sure that the content exposed to the consumers is adequate and free of stereotypes and prejudices; as result of this fact, a powerful medium as advertising sell many stereotypes as the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2010) stated “ Even if advertisement is basically a marketing tool, advertisements convey values, attitudes and stereotypes, potentially influencing general behavior beyond purchasing decisions and, in short, proposing an outlook on the world through their cumulative effects” (p8).

It is known that media is a tool to sell all kind of products and services; and as producers, media want to satisfy necessities, as our interviewee says:

Exactly, satisfy a necessity, but mainly what you want is to sell it, and what is that, to give people what they want, so it is depending on the society and their needs, likes, ideologies, culture, beliefs and interests, but media look for satisfying that (Appendix2, 2016, para. 3). From our perspective, we agree, because media always is selling information, with the purpose of persuade or shape, and inform to the consumer; but this is based on psychological researches about the perceiver.

Now we are going to explain in the next construct how these marketing strategies through media are not new and how it starts in film industry in the middle of the last century with the star system.

Star system

To define the star system, we take into account the stars in Hollywood, who were a stereotype of star’s images in the 50’s where films create an Idol to follow in television and cinemas, as Macdonald (2000) stated, ‘The star system is to look for the standard

mechanisms used by the film industry to construct and promote the images of leading performers”’. (P. 1)

Moreover, the star system is not directed towards producing a uniform category of star: the star system deals in individualism. This was an industry of television and productions films used to sell the images of different celebrities and it becomes to a business, this industry of entertainment was transformed into the strategy in this period of time. The films used the stars to try and manage audience demands of films they produced.

For example, McDonald (2000) gave an explanation of this:

Distributors use the presence of stars to sell films to exhibitors in domestic and overseas markets. Exhibitors, who own and run the theatres showing films, are attracted to films with stars because it is believed the presence of stars help to draw audiences to films. In this circuit of commercial exchange, the star therefore becomes a form of capital, that is to say a form of asset deployed with the intention of gaining advantage in the entertainment market and making profits. (p.5)

Additionally, currently mass media take this form of business making use of stars because is a way to earn money in all fields either in marketing, videos, films, television shows and general all mass media that this industry can sell to the audience throughout the stars.

As a result this system has an impact nowadays, because it is an influence mechanism that allow people to idealize and create stereotypes of what they watch, because they call consumer’s attention in the stars, the stars in the 50’s and the current days make part of the conception we have and they impose the same stereotypes in order to sell images that perhaps are not true. Besides mass media continue to exist to enforce these role models to society only for selling products and increase earnings without taking into account the effects in the perceiver.

Finally, we can mention that famous celebrities such Marilyn Monroe and Marlon Brandon, are examples of stars, whose lives were used to create stereotypes to sell movies, influencing a lot of perceivers in their time with specific ideas of beauty, behaviors and manners in the American continent.

CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion we can say that media is the most effective way for gender stereotypes widespread in America; due to the content that media sell, is a reinforcement of stereotypes, besides media's messages get people from all the American continent in a massive scale, without restriction of time, distance, and cultures. All this helped by the way that human being response to the influence.

Although the media has a huge role in influencing consumers, people is who has the last decision, if they buy or not what media sell them, because if they do not like or do not agree with the messages, they can just turn off the television or not consume the product. For instance, before media offers a new product, they study the consumer's preferences, likes, interests and culture and based on them, media give proposals.

Additionally, we can conclude that media have had great influence in the creation of stereotypes through the star system of celebrities, for that reason, they sold ideas of how people should be using famous stars to sell movies. Although it supposes that the star system is not working nowadays, if we analyze deeply the media's content, we noticed that these techniques of selling are still being used in less rigid way.

Finally, we must not forget that despite the role of media in gender stereotyping, the consumer also has a great responsibility in choosing what they consume, besides the importance of having a better control in the content to sell. For that reason, at the end stereotypes reflect the society's beliefs; which means that even the media's producers create and sell these same stereotypes, because they share the same cultural knowledge.

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APPENDIX 1.

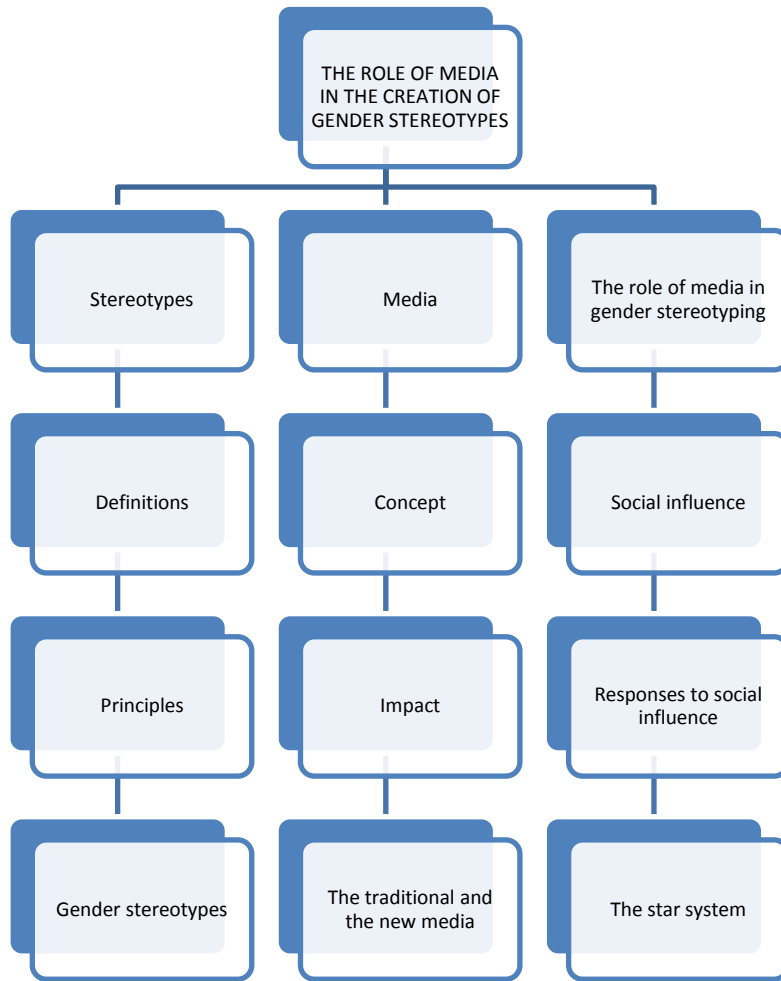


Imagen 2.Map about the role of media in the creation of gender stereotypes. (2016)

APPENDIX 2.

Interview

The following interview was made with the objective to have an opinion of someone directly related with media. The interviewee was the journalist of the Pontificia Javeriana University Camilo Gomez.

Interviewer: Can you tell us your opinion about the role of media in the creation of stereotypes in America, please?

Interviewee: Usually you think that stereotyping is something wrong or Machiavellian, you imagine a person with a black cat saying “we are going to control and manipulate people’s thoughts and decisions”, but I would say that stereotypes are unconscious product of society, the reflect of society; I mean, media does not impose to people. Think in the fact that media has to sell something, media are producers, take as an example when you have a product or a service; what do you want to do with it?

Interviewer: To satisfy a necessity.

Interviewee: exactly, satisfy a necessity, but mainly what you want is to sell it, and what is that, to give people what they want, so it is depending on the society and their needs, likes, ideologies, culture, beliefs and interests, but media look for satisfying that. The big point there is that exist a kind of invisible border because in somewhere the same media proposes tendencies and rarely they impose them, but I think that “imposition” of tendencies or stereotypes in this case is more like an offer of proposals that are based on something that already exist, such as mixing from a color palette, but at the end the consumer take the decision if they buy or not the offer.

Interviewer: you said media does not create stereotypes, but let’s take as an example women and men stereotypes of beauty in films or beauty contest, where they come from, what is the role of media there?

Interviewee: yes, probably media sell the idea, but where they come from, they come from the street, the society; in nowhere someone get dressed a women, an actress for a soap opera inventing the clothes , not, they follow fashion tendencies and is the same with beauty and stereotypes.

Interviewer: so media just sell, you do not think that media knowing their power should be more careful with the content and try to respect the individual identities, in order to not sell many stereotypes?

Interviewee: I think that they should and in fact they do it, but in that, there are many things to discuss such as economic, politics, human rights and over all that exist interests.

Interviewer: Thank you so much Camilo, your opinion is very important to us and helpful, have a nice day.