Media and Gender

Mass media play a unique and important role in the shaping of a society where men and women enjoy equal rights. Raising women's legal awareness is important for the creation of a progressive society. This is reached through several means, including psychological, social, economic, philosophical, awareness of human rights, political and so on. The role of media is important for being successful in all the mentioned spheres. The media can promote and speed up the reforms in progress, or, on the contrary, it can hamper their implementation.

A number of international conferences and conventions have voiced and publicized the need to break public stereotypes through change in the media policy. Mass media, however, continue to reproduce discriminatory stereotypes about women and portray them in sexist ways. As a rule, women are portrayed in a narrow range of characters in mass media. If we were to divide mass media into two categories, such as fictional and news-reporting, then in the former, women are often associated with the household or sex-objects, and in the latter category, they lack roles.

Only in a limited number of news programs do women appear as main actors or experts. One of the reasons for this situation is the smaller number of women in these spheres, but even the existing number of women are underrepresented compared to their male counterparts.

In advertising and magazines, women are usually portrayed as young, slim and with beauty that meets the accepted standards. Women with this kind of appearance are often associated with sex objects.

Why do social scientists attribute importance to study of images and stereotypes of women in media? Femininity, as well as masculinity, are not biological, but rather, cultural constructs. Representations and manifestations of femininity differ across cultures, time and societies. Femininity is culturally and socially constructed by the family, education, the public, and to a larger extent, the media. In this respect, the long-term change in women's images in media could help change the perceptions and stereotypes women face in a society.

In the initial stage of its history, media were managed exclusively by men. The media images of men and **women were tailored to men's preferences**. In other words, men were creating media images of men and women they wished to see in reality.

Media images of women have become a subject of criticism in Feminist Media Studies since 1960s, when Betty Friedan in her book entitled *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) revealed and criticized the image of an ideal woman in post-war America. Friedan calls this image "the happy housewife heroineDespite the fact that today media increasingly associate femininity with independent and powerful women, qualities informed by sexuality continue to play a dominant role in the shaping of femininity.

Fragmental display of the female body and fragmentation of women's body in advertisements promote the objectification of women's bodies. In addition, the portrayed female characters are largely influenced by **the beauty myth.** They have flawless skin, slender stature and embody all components of beauty as perceived in society. As a result of globalization this myth is increasingly generalized across cultures and societies. The standards of beauty as portrayed in media, however, are impossible to achieve, since the models have been transformed into these images through a number of technical means.

One of the reasons of discriminatory images of women in media is the fact that media products, as a rule, are created by men, in men's tastes and for men. In 2012 The International Women's Media Foundation carried out a study of world news agencies and corporations to determine the status of women in the news media. This first large-scale study illustrated that in all areas of media women were still facing problems in achieving equality.

The survey conducted in 59 countries, revealed that women make up only 33.3 percent of full time employees in 522 organizations that participated in the survey. In almost all countries men occupy higher positions. Interestingly, Uganda and Russia are among the top countries where men and women almost equally appear in leading positions. Unfortunately, this has not changed the images of women in media.

The image of women and the voicing of women's concern underwent a revolutionary change due to modern technology and emergence of new types of media. Today, all of us, in fact, are part of

the media not only as consumers, but also as producers. And anyone, woman or man, can cover their problems and story by themselves, make it public, and turn it into media for consumption. These new possibilities, however, also bring about new challenges. In case of traditional media, it is possible to work with the leadership and staff to undergo training and achieve some results. In case of social media, not only groups in need of support voice their opinion, and publicize their perceptions freely, but also those people who threaten these groups and spread discriminatory and offensive comments about them. Thus, the quality of information disseminated in social media and the comments on these pieces of information are much more sexist and patriarchal. Change in this sphere can be achieved only through indirect impact.

References :

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