COURSE TITLE: Gender and Communication

COURSE IDENTIFICATION: COMM 35912

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Sara Roxanna Basel

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ASSIGNMENT TITLE: Gender Communication Paper – Gendered Media: The Influence the Media has on Women and Minorities

ASSIGNMENT PROJECT DESCRIPTION: For this paper I had to pick a topic we covered in class about gender and communication. I had to then use 10 research-based articles to gather information about my topic as well as reflect on the topic I picked. The assignment had to also be APA style, 10 pages, with double-spaced 1-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font, as well as free from grammatical errors.

REFLECTIONS: What I think this pieces shows about me is my strength in staying on topic and the use of good examples to get my point across. What was most interesting to me is finding out much the media does influence minorities and women. What was interesting to me was finding all the examples that backed up my research which are shown in this paper. If I had a chance to do this assignment I would use newer examples since the paper was written in 2012.
Gendered Media: The Influence the Media has on Women and Minorities

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Abstract

This paper explored ten different scholarly articles that reported about gendered media. The main findings, through the paper, argued that gender media exists in today’s society. Through these findings, women and minorities are seen to be portrayed less favorably than white men. These findings also indicated that women are mainly seen as the stereotypes of being highly sexualized and submissive. The “ideal” woman, as defined by the media, is young, skinny, beautiful and white, and that anything less than this is not ideal. Through the rest of the paper, the negative effects of these stereotypes are mentioned, such as women resulting in low self-esteem, eat disorders, and body image issues. All of these negatives stereotypes come as a result of the strain the media puts on women to be ideal and meet unrealistic standards.
Gendered Media: The Influence the Media has on Women and Minorities

Gendered media is defined as a belief that men and women have a different and unequal relationship to mainstream media, in terms of how they are portrayed. The media presents their audiences with images of what men and women should be and look like. The media underrepresents women and minorities as well as stereotyping them. Men are also stereotyped as well in the media, but for this paper I will be discussing how women and minorities are underrepresented in the media and also how stereotyping negatively affects women.

According to (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008):

Research examining the effects of media exposure demonstrates that media consumption has a measureable influence on people’s perceptions of the real world, and, regardless of the accuracy of these perceptions, they are used to help guide subsequent attitudes, judgments, and actions.

Males generally outnumber women no matter what, whether they are on television or movies, men rule the seen in the media. According to Gendered Lives:

Communication, Gender, and Culture states only ten percent of guests on Sunday news programming are women, women are given less time to talk in interviews on television, and (Wood, 2011) refer to women as being “virtually invisible” in news programs. Even the fronts of newspapers have more stories about men than women. According to (Wood, 2011) stated:
That 78% of people would mentioned on television programming were mainly men, 83% of people would mentioned on radio broadcasts were men, and 79% of people mentioned in newspapers were men…and also 70% of major characters in top-grossing films were male.

These particular statistics would make people believe men actually outnumber women in society, which in reality men do not.

Also, minorities are underrepresented in the media just as much as women. Maybe even less. Minorities are usually only casted for supporting roles or for comic relief, while others are portrayed with negative stereotyping such as being a criminal, a rapper, funny, mean, or overweight, for African Americans. For instance, there are no positive televisions shows airing now that feature an all black cast. Most shows usually reference some sort of drugs use, welfare, or parental absence. In my Black Images course, the class discussed how there are no current day black dramas staring an African American, with the leading role. The reason is because African Americans are not seen for this type of acting, but are seen as the stereotypes previously mentioned.

(Chen, Williams, Hendrickson & Chen, 2012) did an in-depth interview with 36 black women, who were ages 18 to 59. Their findings revealed that exaggeratedly overweight depictions of black women portrayed by men, dressed up as women, had a strong effect on their identities. The women reported that portrayals, such as Madea in Tyler Perry's films, Rasputia Latermore in Eddie Murphy's Norbit, and Martin Lawrence's Big Momma, were “mammy-like.” The fact that men dressed as women to depict these roles heightened the stereotypes that these negatives images evoke. The “male mammy” portrayals increased the mockery of black women in the media and
contribute to the feminization of African American men, according to women in the sample.

These sorts of examples show how the media has an effect of hurting women’s personal, gender identity. According to (Monahan, Shtrulis & Givens, 2005) specific stereotype portrayals of African American women in films were hypothesized to produce stereotype-consistent judgments made of a different African American woman. This study used 76 participants, who observed a mammy, jezebel or welfare queen video-segment. A mammy is a stereotyped overweight black woman, who cooks and cleans, and takes care of people. A jezebel is a woman who loves men and idolizes sex, and a welfare queen, is a woman who has many kids and lives off welfare. After the participants observed the video-segment, they observed an African American woman in a mock job interview and rated the interviewee. Participants who observed a specific stereotype associated the interviewee more quickly with stereotype-consistent adjectives than with stereotype-inconsistent adjectives for all three stereotypes. So if participants viewed this African American woman with stereotypical adjectives and words after watching a two-minute video-segment, other people who consume these images in the media will likely view black women the same way.

Besides African American being stereotyped, women of all race and age fall into other categories of stereotyping. The traditional stereotypes of women in the media, besides those for African American women, include women as being sexual objects and women as submissive. The “ideal” woman in today’s society is young, thin, beautiful, and white.

When a woman is in a position of power, such as the rare female bosses portrayed
in *The Proposal* with Sandra Bullock, or *Disclosure* with Demi Moore, she tends to be a cold-hearted, detached career woman with sociopathic tendencies. This sends the message that a powerful woman sacrifices a healthy relationship, family, and possibly even her sanity to be extremely successful at her career. For the young girls whose dream was to run a company, own their own business and become a doctor, the media does not provide enough models for them to look to for encouragement and inspiration. Instead the media wants them to follow and fit the mold of certain stereotypes.

With such hard pressure from the media like magazine covers, digital altering of celebrity photos, and music videos, it is starting to take a toll on how women feel about themselves. With the ideal women, being young and thin, movies are portraying these stereotypes in movies starring young casts.

In (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008) the two-part study, utilized a social cognitive theory framework. The findings documented gender portrayals in teen movies and investigating the influence of exposure to these images on gender-based beliefs about friendships, social aggression, and roles of women in society. First, a content analysis of gender portrayals in teen movies was conducted, revealing that female characters are more likely to be portrayed as socially aggressive than male characters. Second, college students were surveyed about their teen movie-viewing habits, gender-related beliefs, and attitudes. The findings suggested that viewing teen movies is associated with negative stereotypes about female friendships and gender roles.

Teen movies like *Mean Girls* leave audiences with negative depictions of women and young girls. The movies illustrate women in little clothes, stupid, and fantasy about boys and becoming rich. Even Disney movies, from *Beauty and The Beast* to *Aladdin*
show slender, unrealistically curvaceous, and quite vulnerable young women, who are
dependent on male figures for strength and survival, not their own sense of
empowerment. Media stereotyping of women as objects and helpless beings, creates very
low expectations for young girls in society (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008).

Also, media stereotypes have created personal and social issues for some women
and young girls. With the ideal women being stereotyped as thin, white, young, and
beautiful, some women will go to the extremes to achieve unrealistic features. Reports of
body image, low self esteem and self worth can be factors of stereotyping women and the
negative impacts stereotypes produce. Most people know that many images in the media
are fixed by photo shop and digitally altered to create the "perfect" woman and in other
instance the "perfect" man. Examples include photo shopped images of Madonna where
all visible wrinkles are removed and her cheeks heightened, in magazines Kim
Kardashian loses half of her stomach, and even commercials for L’Oreal Feria, brighter
and lighten singer, Beyoncé’s skin so she does not appear as dark (Len-Ríos, Rodgers,
Thorson & Doyle, 2005).

Women’s magazines are full of articles urging that if they can lose those last
twenty pounds, they will have it all such as: the perfect marriage, loving children, great
sex, and a rewarding career (Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009). The roots of the problem,
some analysts say, are economic. By presenting an ideal difficult to achieve and maintain,
the cosmetic and diet product industries are assured of growth and profits. And it is no
accident that youth is increasingly promoted, along with thinness, as an essential to what
is beautiful (Frith, Ping & Hong, 2005).
Women who are insecure about their bodies are more likely to buy beauty products, new clothes, and diet aids. It is estimated that the diet industry alone in the United States is worth anywhere between 40 to 100 billion a year, selling temporary weight loss plans. On the other hand, research indicates that exposure to images of thin, young, air-brushed female bodies is linked to depression, loss of self-esteem and the development of unhealthy eating habits in women and girls (Sung-Yeon, 2005).

The American research group Anorexia Nervosa & Related Eating Disorders, Inc. says that one out of every four college-aged women uses unhealthy methods of weight control, including fasting, skipping meals, excessive exercise, laxative abuse, and self-induced vomiting. The pressure to be thin is also affecting young girls: the Canadian Women's Health Network warns that weight control measures are now being taken by girls as young as five and six. American statistics are similar. Several studies, such as one conducted by Marika Tiggemann and Levina Clark in 2006 titled “Appearance Culture in Nine to Twelve-Year-Old Girls: Media and Peer Influences on Body Dissatisfaction,” indicate that nearly half of all preadolescent girls wish to be thinner, and as a result have engaged in a diet or are aware of the concept of dieting. (Sung-Yeon, 2005) In 2003, Teen magazine reported that 35% of girls six to twelve years old have been on at least one diet, and that 50 to 70% of normal weight girls believe they are overweight. Overall research indicates that 90% of women are dissatisfied with their appearance in some way (Sung-Yeon, 2005).

Researchers generating a computer model of a woman with Barbie-doll proportions, for example, found that her back would be too weak to support the weight of her upper body, and her body would be too narrow to contain more than half a liver and a
few centimeters of bowel. A real woman built that way would suffer from chronic
diarrhea and eventually die from malnutrition. Researchers report that women’s
magazines have ten and one-half times more ads and articles promoting weight loss than
men’s magazines do, and over three-quarters of the covers of women’s magazines
include at least one message about how to change a woman’s bodily appearance, by diet,
exercise or cosmetic surgery (Motsaathebe, 2009).

Television and movies reinforce the importance of a thin body as a measure of a
woman’s worth. Canadian researcher Gregory Fouts reports that over three-quarters of
the female characters in TV situation comedies are underweight, and only one in twenty
are above average in size. Heavier actresses tend to receive negative comments from
male characters about their bodies and 80% of these negative comments are followed by
canned audience laughter (Jaworski, 2009).

Twenty years ago, the average model weighed 8 percent less than the average
woman, but today’s models weigh 23% less. Advertisers believe that thin models sell
products. When the Australian magazine New Woman recently included a picture of a
heavy-set model on its cover, it received letters from grateful readers praising the move.
But its advertisers complained and the magazine returned to featuring bone-thin models.
Advertising Age International concluded that the incident "made clear the influence
wielded by advertisers who remain convinced that only thin models spur the sales of
beauty products (Jaworski, 2009).”

The barrage of messages 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. Women internalize these stereotypes, and judge themselves by the beauty
industry's standards. (Wood, 2005) States women learn to compare themselves to other women, and to compete with them for male attention. This focus on beauty and desirability effectively destroys any awareness and action that might help to change that climate.

In these print advertisements and commercials these cover-ups occur to make people look "perfect" when in reality some of these digital alterations go to the extreme of removing people's hips, to give them a better body, to increase the size of someone's lips to make them appear sexier. Digital alterations go to the extreme of music videos. Before, Hip Hop videos were seen as a dominant source to give women the idealistic body but now even country stars are using women in stereotypical manners. Rap artist like Lil Wayne usually depict women in skimpy clothes in his music videos and are submissive to the men. Usually most of the women are extremely skinny or have unrealistic body portions.

Furthermore, it does not matter what type of media people look at. Print media, such as newspapers and magazine, broadcast media, such as radio and news, and televisions and movies, all follow a format of stereotyping.

My personal life examples- from my own personal life- I have felt victimized my society and the stereotypes. Since I am African American and also a woman I follow under more stereotypes. These stereotypes found in the media, generally carry out in the public. Some people actually believe that certain stereotypes are real and an okay term to define someone. I know that most people, because of Hip Hop and RnB, think that all black women should be able to dance a certain way or act a certain way, when we are out in public. However, when in reality most women act in no one close to the stereotypes
people define them as.

As mentioned in my presentation about gendered media and stereotypes, I compared myself to wanting to look like the stereotypical “ideal” woman. Studies can be proven and data can be found, at the end of the day, women will still want to achieve the ideal look of being skinny, young, pretty, and white or with lighter skin. Even celebrities fall under their own pressure. By allowing people to control what they look like on magazine they are actually trying to mimic their falsified selves in real lives. I’m sure after Madonna looks at her digitally altered picture, where her face look ten years younger, or Kim Kardashian waists drops a couple sizes and Beyoncé appears brighter and with lighter skin tone, they all want to look like this. Then the people are supposed to be role models for younger generations start to feel self-conscious about their own bodies, and they are role models based on how they look.

If the celebrities and other public figures take a better stance, some of these stereotypes can be diminished. The media believes that they give the people what they want, but as these findings mention, the media is hurting the self-pride, self-esteem and self worth of many women all over the world. The media, dominated by men, are controlling how women are supposed to look in movies, on television and in print ads. If more women were let into the field as a power figure, and authority, some of these stereotyping would be able to go away. It is believed that it will take another 75 years to complete gender equality. By that time, these stereotypes could actually come true.

In conclusion the main objective of this paper was to discuss more about
gender and the media and how stereotypes can negatively affect women. These stereotypes put the notion in women and minorities heads, that they are true. Women now believe that the ideal body is young, skinny, and white. Through the ten articles, testable and positive results, determined how the media is affecting women and minorities. Each source provided sufficient enough information to provide a testable study where enough necessary feedback was given to determine the hypotheses were true. In doing some, stereotyping are ruling and degrading the lives of women and minorities. The media is trying to mold women into unrealistics depictions of what they call beautiful. The media is also continuing the rift and uncertainty between minorities and underrepresenting them on televisions shows and movies. With this research on gendered media, there is a better understanding on what gendered media is, which again is: a belief that men and women have a different and unequal relationship to mainstream media, in terms of how they are portrayed. The next 75 years the definition might not exist.
References


