

ROLE OF MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY IN SHAPING PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER

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INTRODUCTION

Media and technology play pivotal roles in modern society, influencing various aspects of human behavior and perception. One significant area of impact is the perception of gender. This article explores how media and technology shape gender perceptions, examining historical contexts, contemporary influences, and the implications of these dynamics. It delves into how traditional media forms, such as television and print, have set foundational gender norms, and how digital media and technology are redefining these perceptions today.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF GENDER REPRESENTATION IN MEDIA

Historically, media has played a crucial role in establishing and perpetuating gender roles. In the early 20th century, print media, including newspapers and magazines, often depicted women in domestic roles and men as breadwinners, reinforcing the patriarchal structure of society. Advertisements from this era typically featured women in kitchens, emphasizing their roles as homemakers, while men were shown in professional settings.

Television, which became widely accessible in the mid-20th century, further entrenched these gender stereotypes. Popular TV shows of the 1950s and 1960s, such as "Leave It to Beaver" and "The Donna Reed Show," portrayed women as dutiful housewives and men as the primary earners. These representations were not merely reflections of societal norms but also served to reinforce and normalize these roles.

SHIFT IN GENDER REPRESENTATION: LATE 20TH CENTURY TO EARLY 21ST CENTURY

The late 20th century saw significant shifts in gender representation in media, spurred by the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Media began to portray women in more diverse roles, reflecting their increasing participation in the workforce and public life. TV shows like "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" and "Murphy Brown" featured independent, career-oriented women, challenging traditional gender roles.

Despite these advances, many media forms continued to perpetuate stereotypes. For instance, action movies often portrayed men as strong, stoic heroes, while women were relegated to secondary roles or depicted as damsels in distress. However, the advent of the internet and digital media has brought new dynamics into play, significantly altering how gender is perceived and represented.

DIGITAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY: NEW FRONTIERS IN GENDER REPRESENTATION

The rise of digital media and technology has profoundly transformed the landscape of gender representation. Social media platforms, streaming services, and online communities offer more diverse and inclusive portrayals of gender, challenging traditional stereotypes and providing a platform for marginalized voices.

SOCIAL MEDIA: AMPLIFYING DIVERSE VOICES

Social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have democratized content creation, allowing individuals to share their stories and perspectives on a global scale. These platforms have been instrumental in amplifying voices that were previously marginalized in traditional media, including those of women, non-binary, and transgender individuals.

Campaigns such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter have utilized social media to highlight issues of gender and racial inequality, mobilizing global audiences and fostering

greater awareness and advocacy. These movements have also sparked discussions about the intersectionality of gender, race, and other social identities, promoting a more nuanced understanding of gender issues.

STREAMING SERVICES AND ONLINE CONTENT: EXPANDING REPRESENTATION

Streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime have significantly expanded the scope of gender representation in media. Unlike traditional television networks, these platforms are not bound by rigid programming schedules or content restrictions, allowing for greater creative freedom and experimentation.

Shows like "Orange Is the New Black," "Pose," and "The Handmaid's Tale" offer complex and diverse portrayals of gender, exploring themes of identity, power, and resistance. These narratives challenge traditional gender norms and provide visibility to underrepresented groups, contributing to a more inclusive media landscape.

IMPACT OF ALGORITHMS AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

While digital media has expanded opportunities for diverse gender representation, it is also influenced by algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) that shape what content is promoted and consumed. Algorithms on social media platforms and streaming services are designed to maximize user engagement, often prioritizing content that aligns with users' preferences and viewing histories.

This can lead to echo chambers, where users are exposed to content that reinforces their existing beliefs and biases. However, it can also promote content that challenges these biases, depending on how the algorithms are designed and implemented. For instance, recommendation systems that prioritize diverse and inclusive content can help to broaden users' perspectives and foster greater understanding of gender issues.

CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS

Despite the progress made in gender representation through media and technology, significant challenges remain. One major issue is the persistence of gender stereotypes and biases in digital spaces. Online harassment and abuse, particularly against women and LGBTQ+ individuals, continue to be pervasive problems, undermining the potential of digital media as a tool for empowerment and inclusivity.

Furthermore, the underrepresentation of women and minorities in the tech industry itself poses a barrier to achieving truly diverse and inclusive media. The lack of diversity in tech leadership and content creation can result in products and algorithms that perpetuate existing biases rather than challenging them.

THE ROLE OF POLICY AND REGULATION

Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from policymakers, industry leaders, and civil society. Policies and regulations that promote diversity and inclusion in media and technology are crucial for fostering a more equitable landscape. This includes measures to combat online harassment, support for diverse content creators, and initiatives to increase representation of women and minorities in the tech industry.

EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES AND MEDIA LITERACY

In addition to policy and regulation, educational initiatives play a vital role in shaping perceptions of gender in media and technology. Media literacy programs that teach critical thinking skills and promote an understanding of gender issues can empower individuals to navigate digital media landscapes more effectively.

These programs can help audiences recognize and challenge gender stereotypes and biases in media, fostering a more critical and informed consumption of content. By equipping individuals with the tools to analyze and question media representations, media literacy initiatives can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society.

CONCLUSION

Media and technology have significant influence in shaping perceptions of gender, with the potential to both reinforce and challenge traditional norms. The evolution from traditional media to digital platforms has opened up new avenues for diverse and inclusive representations of gender, providing a platform for marginalized voices and fostering greater awareness of gender issues. However, significant challenges remain, including the persistence of gender biases and the underrepresentation of women and minorities in the tech industry. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, involving policy and regulation, industry initiatives, and educational programs.

As media and technology continue to evolve, it is crucial to remain vigilant and proactive in promoting diversity and inclusion. By leveraging the potential of digital media and technology, society can move towards a more equitable and inclusive future, where all individuals have the opportunity to see themselves represented and their voices heard.

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