The Impact of Media on Adolescents' Perceptions of Gender Roles

Yijing Guo(✉)

School of Foreign Language, Jilin Normal University, Shandong Province, Jinan 250000, China
guoyijing@jlnu.edu.cn

Abstract. THis paper reviews the gender stereotypes in traditional media (e.g. television and films), printed media (e.g. magazines and printed advertisements), and social media regarding how these contents influence adolescents' perception of gender roles. The majority of literature focuses on adolescents in western countries, and a few of them include Asian countries, however, none of them studies Chinese adolescents. After reviewing several previous studies, this paper summarizes that male and female characters tend to be depicted stereotypically in traditional media and printed media; and in social media, adolescents tend to present themselves in a stereotyped way. These phenomena indicate that they will subsequently influence adolescents' attitudes and behaviors in multidimensional aspects. The review of literature contributes to further studies on the potential impact of new media on adolescents' perception of gender roles.

Keywords: Gender stereotype · Media · Adolescent · Influences

1 Introduction

The article reviews the key literature concerned with the potential impact of gender-stereotyped content in traditional media, printed media, and social media on the gender role of adolescents aged 13 to 18 years old. Numerous scholars have conducted extensive research in analyzing gender stereotypes in television and teen magazines [1–4]. However, a limited number of studies focused on films and social media. Ever since Boyd and Ellison conducted their first study concerned with social websites in 2007, several pieces of research were conducted to examine social media, and a majority of them focused on the use of Facebook [5, 6].

In this review of literature, adolescents' perception of gender roles is mainly reflected in adolescents' gender stereotypes. This can be defined as beliefs about specific characteristics that distinguish men and women in their identities, and it frequently addresses traits, physical characteristics, behaviors, and jobs. [7, 8].

The mass media offers strong gender norm models for the following reasons. For starters, the media offers more role models than young people can find from their families or peers. Additionally, media characters can be more "appealing", making them more likely to be viewed as role models [9]. Secondly, the media helps shape norms directly and indirectly [10]. Third, the consumption of media is extremely high, especially among

adolescents, with 7 h and 22 min per day [11]. Media is certainly not the only source that shapes gender role perceptions, but this paper would argue that it is most likely a significant one.

The purpose of this review of literature is to show study results regarding the media's influence on adolescents' perceptions of gender roles, mainly focused on gender stereotypes. In terms of media, this article focuses on traditional media (e.g., television and films), printed media, and social media. This article illustrates phenomena and influences respectively and is followed with critical thinking and literature support.

2 The Influence of Different Media Types on Gender Roles

2.1 Traditional Media

2.1.1 Stereotyped Characters in Television and Films

Although new media has gained great popularity among adolescents, television continues to play a central role in conveying representations and stereotypes in our societies, particularly about gender. A previous study of TV programs demonstrated that characters tend to be presented in stereotypical ways [1]. In other words, girls and women are expected to be dependent, caring, and romantic; and boys and men are depicted as independent, athletic, and dominant [2]. However, much of the previous literature paid particular interest in the portrayal of female characters both in television and in films.

In television serials, the depiction of female characters is either vicious, plotting a conspiracy, or an ideal image engaged in household chores and trying to make everyone happy. On the other hand, the trend of stereotyping of sexual roles can be observed in television commercials as well, where women are primarily assigned roles such as being unable to make major domestic decisions and showing dependence on men outside [3]. Additionally, in commercials for male products, such as deodorant or shaving cream, women are often involved as sexual objects [12].

The number of literature that focused on the characters' portrayals in films is limited, however, several reviews of the literature have focused on the analysis of films. According to Kumari and Joshi, throughout the film history, the portrayal of women has shifted away from dancing around trees, making love with men, caring for families, and bouncing to acting as ideal daughters or wives [12]. Although for the past few years, there have been women characters who broke the stereotype and there are films of women's success stories, the number is still small. In film scenes, even though women have appeared in the workplace, it is compelled by circumstances and their jobs are usually stereotyped as teachers or receptionists. Otherwise, they prefer to stay in the house or go to the mall despite their advanced education.

2.1.2 Potential Impact

Due to the highly stereotyped portrayal of characters, young children and adolescents can be negatively influenced in terms of their attitudes and behaviors. Television and films create a distorted perception of beauty, that is whether girls are pretty, depends on whether they are slim and fair [12]. This criterion of beauty can lead to adolescent

girls' malnutrition [13]. Additionally, adolescent girls transitioning from childhood to adulthood may be influenced on a social level, that is, as a result of socializing images of women in television or films, they can become obsessed with being popular and fitting in [14, 15]. Also, it is worth mentioning that in terms of television commercials, People are more likely to purchase a product if it is endorsed by a female model [12].

According to Ward and Grower's review of literature, previous psychological research show that it can have serious consequences on the well-being of adolescents if they accept narrow views of what is presumed and appropriate for one's gender [13]. With young women accepting and internalizing the traditional concept of femininity which emphasize passiveness, nurturing, and fine-looking, they had anxiety and depression symptoms, low self-esteem, a higher risk of developing an eating disorder, and diminished sexual agency [16–18]. Moreover, because women's appearance focus appears to be inconsistent with other characteristics, such as intellectual ability, young women who adapt to sexualized appearance ideals may believe they are unable to fulfill academic tasks. [19, 20]. This is consistent with Brown's discovery that young women who accept the sexualized gender norms indicated poor academic self-efficacy [21].

However, several pieces of literature have focused on positive portrayals of women as well. Non-stereotyped female characters function as strong role models for shifting girls' understandings of gender norms [2]. Several studies found that after seeing non-stereotypical depictions of jobs on TV, young women were more adaptable to some grown-up roles and activities, such as activities in the domain of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) [22, 23]. Seeing a non-standard example can boost a young woman's self-esteem and her ability to make judgments on her own [24].

2.1.3 Discussion

The portrayal of characters in television and films has both negative and positive effects depending on whether the depiction is biased or not. Adolescent girls' intelligence can be greatly influenced by traditional media. They become skeptical about their competence, especially in the field of STEM, even though they may be potentially talented in this area. Moreover, girls who excel in STEM may be excluded because they do not fit in the expectation of girls should be pretty and not as smart as boys, and high chances are that they will develop symptoms of depression.

2.2   Printed Media

2.2.1   Presentations in Magazines and Printed Advertisements

A limited number of previous studies have concentrated on the analysis of the portrayal of each gender in printed media, namely, newspapers, magazines, printed advertisements, etc. However, several kinds of literature offered some perspectives on how magazine articles and advertisements depict each gender. One of the valuable is Goffman's framework, his book, Gender Advertisements, laid the groundwork for theories about how males and females would be represented in ads in terms of various visual structure dimensions [4]. Ever since 1979, many studies relating to the framework have been conducted, and separate research has shown that some types of gender representations are consistent with Goffman's findings. Using the Goffman's framework, Pritchard analyzed the content of

UK tour pamphlets and concluded that tourism representation relies heavily on women as ornaments for sexualized products [25].

According to Anjalin's study, in magazine advertisements, men were shown with their arms extended to their female partners, as though marking territory and protecting their 'property' such as EXPRESS Apparel ad, and MICHAEL KORS ads [26]. Some advertisements promote perfumes making use of sex appeals (e.g., Chance CHANEL EauTendre, GUCCI). In those advertisements, women were fully naked or in half-dressed appearances, such as wearing backless clothes, showing their cleavages, skin, and belly-buttons, whereas with their partners they were seen in provokingly romantic poses (e.g., GUESS, and GUCCI Guilty ad).

In addition, in the sample magazines selected by Anjalin, no female model appears as the image of a working woman, namely, a lawyer, a businesswoman, a judge, a politician, a professor, a soldier, a doctor, etc. [26]. Furthermore, neither was a woman portrayed as a stimulated and aggressive individual learning, organizing timetables, and dealing with the problems brought by the rapid development of industries, etc.

2.2.2   Subsequent Influence

Previous literature that pays attention to the influence of printed media on adolescents is limited. However, several kinds of previous studies discussed this issue. The gender portrayal in printed media has a similar impact on adolescents than that of traditional media. It can be seen in adolescents' behaviors and attitudes as well. T The portrayal of women in printed advertisements has altered adolescents' understandings of perfection, such that being bony slim is what adolescent girls pursue. In that case, identification with these models eventually contributes to a rising rate of malnutrition [12]. Moreover, according to Anjalin, if adolescent girls internalize the message that their physical attractiveness is their pivotal value, it will become an obstacle for women to evaluate their success, achievement, and future potential [26].

The other literature from Ward and other scholars paid particular interest in how the sexualized media may influence boys' interpretation of women and courtship [27]. Results suggested that as boys consumed more sexualizing magazines, they showed more traditional beliefs about how to pursue females [27].

2.2.3   Discussion

The figure of previous studies concerning how printed media affects adolescents is very limited, which are mostly focused on adolescent girls and young women. However, we can still sense a little information through the small amount of literature. The potential influence of printed media is very much similar to that of traditional media. However, there is a lack of research on the positive portrayal of women or men in printed media and its corresponding influence on adolescents.

2.3 Social Media

2.3.1 Adolescents' Self-representation on the Internet

Examples of social media include but are not limited to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other social websites. Social media "build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and… allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" [28]. Several recent pieces of research focused on adolescents' online self-presentation indicated that young people adopt stereotyped gender images from traditional media and society [29–31]. Adolescents' perception of gender roles can be seen in their self-representation, namely, their online profiles, their languages, and the pictures they post.

Nowadays, visual contents, such as photographs, consist mostly of online users' profiles, especially among teens and young adults [32]. When adolescents post sexy pictures of themselves on social media, there should be evidence that they are acting out typical masculine or feminine gender norms. [29, 33, 34]. Research also showed that adolescent boys and girls all tend to post a stereotyped gendered image of attractive women and masculine men [29, 33, 35]. According to Herring and Kapidzic, in a study of profiles on various social websites, American female users reported posting "cute" pictures [31]. Conversely, male participants were more likely to share pictures and comments that contained sexual language and refer to alcohol, which feature them as self-promoting [36].

Adolescents also reveal their online self-representation when they engaged in online chat, or when they post blogs with textual information. A large number of literature paid special attention to adolescents' online self-representation on the level of language use and identified gender patterns, for example, in a study conducted by Guiller and Durndell, although the results showed that adolescent boys and girls did not differ in their use of language terms such as first-person pronouns, there were big gender differences in their usage of stylistic elements. [37]. It refers to males being more likely to use authoritative language and to give negative responses when interacting, while females were more likely to agree explicitly, support others, and make more personal and emotional contributions. Similarly, Kapidzic and Herring analyzed adolescents' textual communications on five teenage chat sites, the majority of which are based in the United States; and discovered significant gender differences [33]. When inviting or directing others, boys tend to use manipulative acts, while girls use more reactive acts. On the other hand, boys' language was more competitive and flirtatious than girls', which was most often friendly [33]. Moreover, Thelwall and other scholars analyzed adolescents' use of tone and found that the tone in female messages is more positive than that in the males [38].

In addition, sexualized language use is prevalent in adolescents' online communications with their peers [31]. In Subrahmanyam and other scholars' research, adolescent boys used more explicit sexual language, whereas girls used more implicit sexual language [39].

2.3.2   Underlying Effect

A limited number of studies have yet to examine the influence of social network use on adolescents' perception of gender roles. Most current research emphasized adolescents' self-representation, which reveals an eminent stereotyped image of their gender.

Additionally, online profiles can work as a guideline for adolescents. However, since most online profiles are gender stereotyped, thus, frequent viewing of these may reinforce adolescents' stereotyped perception of gender roles.

2.3.3   Discussion

In terms of social media's potential impact on adolescents' perception of gender roles, most research focused on adolescents' online self-representations. Although most analyses indicate that adolescents' self-representations are gender stereotyped, social media do play a part in helping adolescents' self-exploration of their identities.

3   Conclusion

To sum up, these cited studies highlight the need for paying attention to the stereotyped content conveyed in media. With all the evidence, it can be concluded that the stereotyped contents in media can have a detrimental effect on adolescents' cognitive development.

However, these studies remain narrow in focus dealing only with traditional media, namely, television and advertisements. There are some research gaps about the gender-stereotyped contents in new media and its potential impact. A more systematic and theoretical analysis is required for studying the area of new media. One of the challenges in studying this area is that the group of internet users is huge. However, it is hard to define the age group since their age numbers can be falsified, which should be investigated in the future.

References

1. J. Glascock, "Gender Roles on Prime-Time Network Television: Demographics and Behaviors", Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, vol. 45, no. 4, pp. 656-669, 2001. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem4504_7.
2. J. Steinke, M. Long, M. Johnson, and S. Ghosh, Gender stereotypes of scientist characters in television programs popular among middle school-aged children. annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Marriott Downtown, Chicago, IL, 2008.
3. A. Courtney and S. Lockeretz, "A Woman's Place: An Analysis of the Roles Portrayed by Women in Magazine Advertisements", Journal of Marketing Research, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 92-95, 1971. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/002224377100800114.
4. E. Goffman, Gender advertisements. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979.
5. D. M. Boyd, N. B. Ellison, (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13(1), article 11. | socialcapitalgateway.org", Socialcapitalgateway.org, 2022. [Online]. Available: https://www.socialcapitalgateway.org/content/paper/boyd-d-m-ellison-n-b-2007-social-network-sites-definition-history-and-scholarship-jour. [Accessed: 03- May- 2022].

6. R. Wilson, S. Gosling, and L. Graham, "A Review of Facebook Research in the Social Sciences", Perspectives on Psychological Science, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 203-220, 2012. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691612442904.

7. G. Johar, P. Moreau, and N. Schwarz, "Gender Typed Advertisements and Impression Formation: The Role of Chronic and Temporary Accessibility", Deepblue.lib.umich.edu, 2022. [Online]. Available: https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/142219. [Accessed: 03-May- 2022].

8. R. Lerner, L. Liben and U. Mueller, Handbook of child psychology and developmental science, cognitive processes. John Wiley & Sons, 2015, pp. 806–53.

9. L. Reinecke and M. Oliver, The Routledge handbook of media use and well-being: International perspectives on theory and research on positive media effects. Routledge, 2016, pp. 396–408.

10. J. Brown, C. Halpern, and K. L'Engle, "Mass media as a sexual super peer for early maturing girls", Journal of Adolescent Health, vol. 36, no. 5, pp. 420-427, 2005. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2004.06.003.

11. V. Rideout, "The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens", Common Sense Media, 2015. [Online]. Available: https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/the-common-sense-census-media-use-by-tweens-and-teens-2019. [Accessed: 03- May- 2022].

12. A. Kumari and H. Joshi, Gender stereotyped portrayal of women in the media: Perception and impact on adolescent. 2015, pp. 44–52.

13. L. Ward and P. Grower, "Media and the Development of Gender Role Stereotypes", Annual Review of Developmental Psychology, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 177-199, 2020. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-devpsych-051120-010630.

14. L. Brown and C. Gilligan, Meeting at the crossroads. Cambridge: Harvard Univ Press, 1992.

15. P. Orenstein, Schoolgirls: Young women, self-esteem, and the confidence gap. Anchor, 2013.

16. N. Curtin, L. Ward, A. Merriwether, and A. Caruthers, "Femininity Ideology and Sexual Health in Young Women: A focus on Sexual Knowledge, Embodiment, and Agency", International Journal of Sexual Health, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 48-62, 2011. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2010.524694.

17. D. Tolman, E. Impett, A. Tracy and A. Michael, "Looking Good, Sounding Good: Femininity Ideology and Adolescent Girls' Mental Health", Psychology of Women Quarterly, vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 85-95, 2006. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2006.00265.x.

18. E. Zurbriggen, R. Collins, S. Lamb, T. Roberts, D. Tolman, and L. Ward, APA task force on the sexualization of girls. 2007.

19. C. Starr and G. Ferguson, "Sexy Dolls, Sexy Grade-Schoolers? Media & Maternal Influences on Young Girls' Self-Sexualization", Sex Roles, vol. 67, no. 7-8, pp. 463-476, 2012. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-012-0183-x.

20. E. Stone, C. Brown and J. Jewell, "The Sexualized Girl: A Within-Gender Stereotype Among Elementary School Children", Child Development, vol. 86, no. 5, pp. 1604-1622, 2015. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12405.

21. C. Brown, "Sexualized gender stereotypes predict girls' academic self-efficacy and motivation across the middle school", International Journal of Behavioral Development, vol. 43, no. 6, pp. 523-529, 2019. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025419862361.

22. S. Rosenwasser, M. Lingenfelter and A. Harrington, "Nontraditional gender role portrayals on television and children's gender role perceptions", Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 97-105, 1989. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/0193-3973(89)90016-6.

23. R. Wroblewski and A. Huston, "Televised Occupational Stereotypes and their Effects on Early Adolescents: Are they Changing?", The Journal of Early Adolescence, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 283-297, 1987. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431687073005.

24. J. Jennings-Walstedt, F. Geis and V. Brown, "Influence of television commercials on women's self-confidence and independent judgment.", Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, vol. 38, no. 2, pp. 203-210, 1980. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.38.2.203.

25. A. Pritchard and N. Morgan, "Constructing tourism landscapes - gender, sexuality and space", Tourism Geographies, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 115-139, 2000. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/146166 80050027851.

26. U. Anjalin, A content analysis of gender stereotypes in contemporary teenage magazines. 2015.

27. L. Ward, L. Vandenbosch, and S. Eggermont, "The impact of men's magazines on adolescent boys' objectification and courtship beliefs", Journal of Adolescence, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 49-58, 2015. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2014.12.004.

28. A. Kaplan and M. Haenlein, "Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media", Business Horizons, vol. 53, no. 1, pp. 59-68, 2010. DOI: https://doi.org/10. 1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003.

29. A. Manago, M. Graham, P. Greenfield, and G. Salimkhan, "Self-presentation and gender on MySpace", Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, vol. 29, no. 6, pp. 446-458, 2008. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2008.07.001.

30. I. Tortajada-Giménez, N. Araüna-Baró and I. Martínez-Martínez, "Advertising stereotypes and gender representation in social networking sites", Comunicar, vol. 21, no. 41, pp. 177-186, 2013. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3916/c41-2013-17.

31. S. Herring and S. Kapidzic, Teens, gender, and self-presentation in social media. Elsevier Oxford, 2015, pp. 1–16.

32. G. Salimkhan, A. Manago and P. Greenfield, The construction of the virtual self on MySpace. 2010.

33. S. Kapidzic and S. Herring, "Gender, Communication, and Self-Presentation in Teen Chat-rooms Revisited: Have Patterns Changed", Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 39-59, 2011. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2011.01561.x.

34. E. Renold and J. Ringrose, "Schizoid subjectivities? Re-theorizing teen girls' sexual cultures in an era of 'sexualization'", Journal of Sociology, vol. 47, no. 4, pp. 389-409, 2011. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783311420792.

35. A. Siibak, Constructing the self through the photo selection-visual impression management on social networking websites. 2009.

36. J. Peluchette and K. Karl, "Social Networking Profiles: An Examination of Student Attitudes Regarding Use and Appropriateness of Content", CyberPsychology & Behavior, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 95-97, 2008. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2007.9927.

37. J. Guiller and A. Durndell, "Students' linguistic behavior in online discussion groups: Does gender matter?", Computers in Human Behavior, vol. 23, no. 5, pp. 2240-2255, 2007. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2006.03.004.

38. M. Thelwall, D. Wilkinson, and S. Uppal, "Data mining emotion in social network communication: Gender differences in MySpace", Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, vol. 61, no. 1, pp. 190-199, 2010. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1002/asi. 21180.

39. K. Subrahmanyam, D. Smahel and P. Greenfield, "Connecting developmental constructions to the internet: Identity presentation and sexual exploration in online teen chat rooms", Developmental Psychology, vol. 42, no. 3, pp. 395-406, 2006. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.42.3.395.