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## **The role of the media in achieving gender equality**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The role of the media in achieving gender equality is vital and influential in building an equal and just society. Media, whether traditional or new, has the ability to shape and guide opinions, beliefs, and public understanding of gender equality issues. It highlights gender equality topics and sheds light on the challenges faced by both women and men in their communities. The media holds the power to convey messages that enhance awareness and drive change toward a society where both genders are considered equal in opportunities and rights.

**Keywords:** Gender, Sex, Media, Gender Equality.

### **Introduction:**

The relationship between gender and media has been represented in various forms in research conducted over the past decades, leading to numerous policy recommendations, reports, books, and articles. The year 2015 witnessed a renewed interest in these issues due to the global celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women (held in Beijing in 1995) and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) adopted at that time. Twenty years after identifying "Women and Media" as one of the critical areas for promoting gender equality at both global and local levels, many initiatives were launched to assess the progress made in this field, identify ongoing problems, and propose possible ways to achieve change.

At the international level, UNESCO established a Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMAG) in 2014, aiming to unify the many stakeholders that need to engage and find ways to work together in a concerted effort to overcome ongoing gender discrimination in the representation of genders in the media, both in production and consumption. At the European level, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has been active over the years in evaluating, monitoring, and promoting progress in all critical areas defined in the BPfA. Furthermore, since 2012, EIGE has specifically focused on media and gender in its ongoing monitoring

practices.

From the above, we can derive the following problem: **What is the role of media in achieving gender equality?**

### **1. The Concept of Gender and Sex:<sup>1</sup>**

- **Sex:** Refers to the biological characteristics that distinguish between male and female bodies. There are key differences in typical male and female hormone levels, genetics, and reproductive organs. These biological characteristics of males and females are consistent across all cultures and societies.

The concept of sex refers to the biological classification of individuals into two categories: male and female, based on physical and anatomical characteristics such as hormones and reproductive organs. Sex is typically considered binary, with individuals generally classified as either male or female. However, there are also rare cases known as differences in sexual development, where biological variations can make the binary classification of sex unclear.

- **Gender:** Gender refers to how roles, values, and relationships between men and women are perceived in society. The attitudes of men and women, and the expectations about what is masculine or feminine, are shaped by social and cultural contexts rather than being set in stone. The concept of gender is not primarily determined by biology but is constructed by society and individuals. This means that perceptions of gender are constantly evolving and can differ significantly across cultures, countries, and generations.

Gender defines what is expected, permitted, and valued in a woman or a man within a specific context. For example, in many societies, women are more likely to be expected to perform household chores and take care of children, while men face greater pressure to earn an income to support the family. Women may be seen as sensitive and compassionate, whereas men are viewed as strong. Women can wear skirts, but men typically do not.

Thus, it can be said that gender is a concept that refers to the roles, behaviors, expectations, and values related to males and females in society. Gender is considered a social and cultural construct, not merely a biological classification, as culture and the living society shape how individuals think and behave regarding gender identity.

- **The Emergence of the Concept of Gender:** In the 1950s and 1960s, the term "gender" was developed under the supervision of psychoanalyst Robert Stoller. However, it was adopted by feminist studies in the early 1970s by British sociologist Ann Oakley, who used the concept of gender in her book to distinguish between "biological characteristics (sex)" and "socio-cultural characteristics." Gender began as a contrast to sex, serving as a tool to analyze the conflict between culture and nature in the realm of sexuality, emphasizing that sex is a social construct.

This highlights the foundational framework of social sciences that "everything is social," a perspective that can be traced back to Durkheim. This approach was applied to sexual matters as a critical tool to dismantle the notion of natural sex and sexuality, and to critique the existing system that always claims to be a natural one.

If nature does not justify the idea that a man is a man and a woman is a woman, then gender roles become open to revision, debate, and critique.

The English term "gender" corresponds to the French term "genre," and it has been translated into Arabic as "نوع" (literally "type" or "category"). This translation is the result of a historical and cultural context that reflects an awareness of the distinction between a person's biological sexual identity and their social identity as a man or woman. This awareness emerged in fields such as psychology and anthropology, highlighting observable realities that dictate social interactions, and has since spread to other fields<sup>2</sup>.

## **2. The Difference Between Sex and Gender:**

Various terms are regularly used in sex and gender theories, such as sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, gender roles, and sexual orientation. It is important to be clear about the meanings of these terms, as people often use "sex" and "gender" interchangeably, which is incorrect. The term "sex" refers to biological physical differences, whereas "gender" refers to how individuals identify themselves and their social identity.

"Sex" refers to the physical differences between individuals who are male, female, or intersex. Sex is usually assigned to a person at birth based on physiological characteristics, including reproductive organs and chromosomal structure. This assigned sex is referred to as a person's "birth sex".

On the other hand, the term "gender" involves how a person identifies themselves, as opposed to their birth sex. Gender is not limited to binary forms; rather, it represents a broad spectrum where a person can identify themselves at any point within this spectrum or even outside of it entirely.

Individuals may identify with a gender that differs from their birth sex or may not identify with any gender at all. These personal gender identities may include multiple gender identities or decentralized ones. There are many other ways a person may define their own gender.

Gender also exists as a social construct, such as "gender roles" or "gender norms." These roles are defined as the behaviors, traits, and roles that society considers appropriate for men and women<sup>3</sup>.

## **2. Gender and Equality:**

Gender equality refers to a state where access to rights, opportunities, and resources is not influenced by gender. It means that women, men, transgender individuals, and people with diverse gender identities have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities, regardless of their assigned gender at birth. This concept is rooted in human rights and is essential for peaceful societies and the development of communities.

Gender equality is recognized by the equal participation of women and men in various areas of life, such as the economy, social and political life, and education. It is also referred to as gender parity or gender equality<sup>4</sup>.

### **Key Aspects:**

- **Economic Participation:** Gender equality in the economy involves the equal integration of men and women into the labor market. Despite progress, women are still less likely to advance to management positions and tend to receive lower pay for the same work.
- **Social and Political Equality:** Gender equality in social and political life means equal representation and decision-making opportunities for all genders. This includes valuing different behaviors, ambitions, and needs equally, regardless of gender.

- **Education and Health:** Gender equality in education benefits all children. Girls who receive an education earn higher lifetime wages and contribute to a stronger economy. Better health outcomes also result from gender equality, including reduced depression, post-traumatic stress, and improved overall well-being<sup>5</sup>.

**-Examples and Benefits of Household Work:**

Gender equality at home involves dividing household tasks as evenly as possible among all genders, so that the burden of managing the home and family does not fall entirely on women.

**-Equal Pay for Equal Work:**

Gender equality in the labor market means receiving the same salary for equal work, regardless of gender. This includes not penalizing women for taking maternity leave and ensuring equal opportunities for promotions and career advancement.

**-Zero Tolerance for Sexual Harassment and Gender Bias:** A society that values gender equality does not tolerate hurtful comments, harassment, or bias based on gender.

**-Importance and Measurement by the United Nations:** The United Nations defines gender equality as the vision that men and women should be treated equally in social, economic, and all aspects of society<sup>6</sup>.

Gender equality is fundamental to human rights and peaceful societies; it involves equal access to resources, opportunities, and rights, regardless of gender. Achieving gender equality requires changes in policies, the elimination of harmful practices against women and girls, and the promotion of gender neutrality and justice in all aspects of life.

**4. Media and Its Role in Gender Equality:**

The role of media in achieving gender equality is multifaceted and crucial. Media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion, challenging harmful stereotypes, and advocating for political and social reforms. Here are some key aspects of the role of media in gender equality:

- **Representation and Narratives:**

**-Representation:** Media can help raise awareness about gender equality issues by representing diverse gender identities and experiences. This helps individuals feel seen and heard, challenging harmful stereotypes and fostering empathy.

**-Narratives:** Media can use storytelling to humanize marginalized individuals and raise awareness about gender-based discrimination, contributing to the creation of a more inclusive and just society.

- **Advocacy and Influence on Policies:**

**-Advocacy:** Media can use its platforms to express opposition to harmful policies and promote change. For example, media coverage of the #MeToo movement has increased awareness of sexual harassment and assault, empowering survivors to share their stories and generating discussions about consent and sexual violence.

**-Influence on Policies:** Media can influence policy reforms by emphasizing the importance of gender equality and challenging discriminatory norms. This includes advocating for equal pay for equal work, equal

representation in decision-making positions, and the elimination of gender-based violence<sup>8</sup>.

In many countries around the world, women's opinions are often disregarded, and they are not taught how to ask questions or engage in public dialogues. Many women remain unaware of their basic rights to education, property, retirement, and more, which hinders their ability to challenge existing norms and stereotypes. This makes it difficult to achieve the inclusive societies we aim for through the global development agenda. Access to information empowers women to demand their rights and make better decisions.

Therefore, the media industry should be encouraged to produce content that works to transform gender perceptions and develop self-regulatory policies for equality, including access to decision-making positions. Mechanisms should be established to monitor and evaluate progress within the sector, thus creating gender equality in content, the workplace, and various departments.

- **Challenges and Responsibilities:**

**-Challenges:** Media should avoid sensationalism and instead strive to provide balanced and accurate reporting, ensuring fair representation of all genders and avoiding the repetition of harmful stereotypes.

**-Responsibilities:** Journalists and media organizations have clear obligations toward the public interest by adhering to ethical standards, such as striving for and presenting the truth, minimizing harm, acting independently, and being accountable and transparent<sup>9</sup>.

- **Media's Impact on Society:**

**-Gender Stereotypes:** Media can perpetuate gender stereotypes, which may negatively affect society. Research indicates that children are influenced by gender stereotypes in the media from an early age, leading to the formation of traditional views on gender roles and expectations.

**-Gender Inequality in the Media Sector:** The media sector itself is not immune to gender inequality. Women are underrepresented in media organizations, especially in senior positions, and face unique barriers and security risks.

- **Recommendations:**

**-Gender-Sensitive Content:** Media should create gender-sensitive and gender-transformative content to challenge traditional social and cultural norms and attitudes regarding gender perceptions.

**-Safety of Women in Media:** The media industry must prioritize the safety of women in media, providing support mechanisms and addressing gender-based violence in the workplace.

1. **Recognition by the United Nations of Media's Role in Achieving Gender Equality:**

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) announced a partnership agreement with various media outlets around the world aimed at directing attention and taking effective action toward achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2030, particularly promoting gender equality and empowering women.

Given the significant role that media plays in changing prevailing stereotypes about women, the "Increasing Work for Gender Equality" initiative acts as a media alliance, with media organizations committing to enhancing focus on women's rights and gender equality issues through high-quality media coverage.

During the announcement of this partnership, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women,

emphasized that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 requires effective partnerships with the media. Mlambo-Ngcuka pointed out the importance of media reflecting the diversity of society and not representing a limited number of individuals, asserting that media is an important source of facts and dreams, and thus plays a crucial role in shaping our perspective of the world.

The Executive Director noted that the majority of news is conveyed by men, which often distorts facts and reality, calling for the need to address this issue through partnerships with media to change these dynamics.

A total of 39 different media organizations, representing print, visual, and audio media, have joined this partnership, facilitating access to a wide audience in various regions around the world<sup>10</sup>.

### **Conclusion:**

From the above, it can be concluded that media plays a prominent role in achieving gender equality as a means of raising awareness. Media can direct attention to gender equality issues and enhance awareness of their importance by covering relevant events and stories. It can provide balanced and inclusive representations of both genders, helping to break down prevailing stereotypes and promote fair and equal representation.

Media can showcase positive role models in both men and women, fostering confidence and ambition among girls and women. Additionally, it can support movements and campaigns advocating for gender equality and promote pressure for social change. Media has the capacity to facilitate dialogue and communication around gender equality issues, encouraging viewers to engage and participate.

Media can be considered a positive force in supporting and promoting gender equality through balanced and multifaceted media coverage and presenting images aimed at the desired social change.

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