

THE ISSUE OF GENDER EQUALITY IN THE MEDIA: REPRESENTATION, POWER, AND PROGRESS

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Abstract: Gender equality in the media is a significant societal concern that affects how individuals perceive themselves and others. Media, as a powerful tool of communication and cultural expression, plays a critical role in shaping public understanding of gender roles. Despite progress in recent years, women and marginalized gender groups continue to face underrepresentation, stereotyping, and exclusion from leadership positions in media industries. This article explores the multifaceted nature of gender inequality in media, including both on-screen representation and behind-the-scenes participation. It also discusses the consequences of such inequality on societal attitudes and offers insights into ongoing efforts and initiatives aimed at achieving a more equitable media landscape. The analysis reveals that while some strides have been made, systemic challenges remain. Addressing these issues requires intentional change across media institutions, policy-making, and audience engagement.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Media Representation, Stereotyping, Women in Media, Media Power Dynamics, Gender Bias, Intersectionality, Media Reform

The media—whether in the form of news, television, film, digital platforms, or advertising—is a central force in shaping cultural norms, identities, and public discourse. Its influence extends beyond entertainment or information; it also mirrors and molds society's perceptions of gender roles and relationships. As such, the issue of gender equality in the media is not simply about fairness in representation, but about social justice, empowerment, and the construction of reality itself. Despite decades of advocacy and some notable progress, gender inequality remains deeply embedded in media industries worldwide. Women and gender-diverse individuals continue to be underrepresented in media content, particularly in authoritative roles such as experts, leaders, or protagonists. Even when present, female characters are often subject to stereotyping or marginalization. These portrayals have a profound impact on how audiences, especially young people, view themselves and others. Beyond the screen, gender disparities persist behind the scenes. Women, particularly those from marginalized communities, are underrepresented in key decision-making roles such as directors, editors, producers, and media executives. Pay gaps, harassment, and exclusion from leadership further exacerbate inequality and hinder progress.[1]

The implications are vast. When media consistently centers male experiences and voices, it reinforces a limited worldview and perpetuates gender norms that are out of sync with modern values. Addressing gender inequality in the media is essential for creating a more inclusive and equitable society. This article explores the core dimensions of gender inequality in media, its societal impacts, and the strategies being employed to address it, emphasizing the urgent need for structural reform and cultural change. The portrayal of gender in media content is one of the most visible forms of inequality. Research consistently shows that women are underrepresented in film, television, and news. A 2023 report by the Global Media Monitoring Project revealed that only 24% of the people seen, heard, or read about in news media are women. In entertainment, the gap is equally concerning. Women are often portrayed in limited, stereotypical roles—such as caregivers, love interests, or victims—while men are depicted as leaders, heroes, or professionals.

Furthermore, women in media are frequently judged based on appearance, contributing to the objectification and sexualization of female characters. This leads to unrealistic beauty standards and can negatively affect the self-esteem of female audiences. On the other hand, male

characters are allowed a broader emotional and professional range, reinforcing patriarchal norms.[2]

Behind the scenes, the gender gap widens further. Women, especially women of color, remain significantly underrepresented in directing, producing, and executive roles. According to a 2024 study by Women in Film, only 18% of major film directors in Hollywood were women, and just 6% were women of color. This lack of diversity among decision-makers influences the kinds of stories told and the perspectives prioritized. In journalism, while women have made progress, leadership positions remain predominantly male. This imbalance contributes to editorial biases, limiting the scope of issues covered and how they are framed. Media not only reflects culture but also shapes it. Gender-biased portrayals contribute to the normalization of inequality, violence, and discrimination. When young audiences are repeatedly exposed to limiting gender roles, they internalize these norms, which can affect educational choices, career aspirations, and interpersonal relationships.

Moreover, the absence of diverse gender voices in newsrooms and production companies means that important issues—such as reproductive rights, gender-based violence, and economic inequality—may be inadequately covered or misrepresented.

Despite these challenges, there are growing efforts to push for gender equality in media. Organizations like the Geena Davis Institute and UN Women promote gender equity in content and leadership. Initiatives such as the 50/50 by 2020 campaign encouraged media organizations to commit to gender parity in staffing and production. Digital platforms and independent media have also become spaces for more inclusive storytelling, allowing marginalized voices to bypass traditional gatekeepers and reach wider audiences.

Gender equality in the media is both a reflection and a driver of broader social change. The persistent disparities in representation and leadership reveal the extent to which media institutions are still shaped by patriarchal norms and structural barriers. From the portrayal of women in stereotypical and objectified roles to the exclusion of female professionals behind the scenes, the media continues to reproduce gender inequality, often unconsciously. However, the landscape is not without hope. Increased awareness, activism, and technological innovation have begun to shift the conversation. Audiences are demanding more inclusive and authentic narratives, and media organizations—faced with public pressure and internal reckoning—are beginning to respond. Yet, tokenistic gestures or surface-level changes are not enough. Real transformation requires a commitment to equity at every level: from hiring practices and content production to policy-making and audience engagement. The journey toward gender equality in the media is ongoing and must be intersectional—acknowledging that gender does not exist in isolation from race, class, sexuality, and ability. The goal is not merely to add more women to existing structures but to reimagine those structures so that they serve everyone more fairly and truthfully.

Ultimately, the media has the potential to be a powerful tool for equality—if wielded responsibly. By amplifying diverse voices, challenging stereotypes, and promoting balanced power dynamics, it can foster greater understanding and pave the way for a more just and equitable society. Achieving gender equality in media is not only possible; it is essential.

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