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# Gender Stereotypes in Ukrainian Mass Media and Media Educational Tools to Contain Them

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**Abstract:** Theoretical substantiations and practical recommendations on media educational contain against gender stereotypes in the Ukrainian mass media are given in the work. Attention is paid to the pathogenic factor of the use of gender-sensitive content. The work is based on propedeutic theoretic studies of cultural and psychosocial background of Ukraine. We also used a content analysis of news and advertising materials of heterogenic media; sociologic methods (surveys, questionnaires); modelling of educational situations and forecasting of expected results. That was an end-to-end method of generalization (induction) that covered theoretical and practical stages of the study. It is proved that despite the weakening of gender divisions in the socio-cultural sphere in the world, in developing countries (on the example of Ukraine) gender stereotypes remain a powerful tool for affective approach of media and advertising to the consumer. Author's ways to increase the level of media literacy and critical thinking with the help of gender-sensitive experiments, mini-projects, filling the media space with "mirror" about sexist content and creating a personal media field are proposed.

**Keywords:** *Sensitive content, sexism, media literacy, pathogenic factor, psychosocial background, advertising materials, heterogeneous media.*

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## Introduction

The basic theory of journalism states that one of the most significant means of the influence of mass communication tools (hereinafter – MCT) remains the aspect of topic choosing, on which they concentrate the attention of citizens. Cyrillic segment of media, according to scientists, has the features of emotionalism, absence of etiquette and focusing on the mass recipient. The latter, being in a remote dialogue with media content, is partially responsible for its content ('orders it' subconsciously). If the electorate 'votes with its feet', then the TV recipients do it with their eyes, or more precisely 'with their fingers on the remote control'.

On the other hand, in the countries with unstable democracies, there is a set of methods of linguistic and visual manipulation used to give necessary covert assessment of existing facts or phenomena, which are pressed on the audience. It concerns to Ukraine to a considerable extent.

Media education is an effective instrument of fighting against low-quality media. If media education movement in Western European countries began in 30s of the twentieth century, in the countries of former communist block – in the late 80s – early 90s, then in Ukraine - only in the early 2000s, and the Concept of Media Education Implementation was adopted only in 2010.

The category of *gender* was entered into the conceptual apparatus of science in the late 60s - early 70s of the twentieth century and was used first in history, historiography, sociology and psychology, then was adopted in linguistics, and later - in journalism. A number of contemporary scientists have devoted their works to the problem of social stereotypes, in particular gender ones: Greyson et al. (2010), Jung and Lennon (2003); Zosuls et al (2011). Including Ukrainian ones: M. Mayerchyk et al. (2013). Media education studios are the most actual on the territories of the former USSR today: Fedorov (2001), Spichkin (1999), Chornodon et al. (2021), Redchuk et al. (2020), Onkovych et al. (2016). Conferences, round tables and discussions on the current gender issues are hold in the world regularly. As a result, there is a publishing of guides to action, reports, collections of scientific papers (Gender and Media, 2019; Gender Stereotypes in the Media, 2015; Nerubasska & Maksymchuk, 2020, Nerubasska, Palshkov, & Maksymchuk, 2020).

In this regard, we consider it expedient to conduct a detailed analysis of the key factors of the negative impact of MCT, from which it is possible to protect ourselves through media tools. The phenomenon of stereotypes as a pathogenetic factor in gender issues was chosen for monitoring and

evaluation. This subject of research corresponds to the current international media education issues in terms of containing stereotypes, defamation and manipulation of the consciousness of the masses. The proposed tools to contain stereotypes can be used to reform the media space in developing countries.

### **Gender and gender stereotypes in the postmodern world**

Consider the main trends in the study of gender stereotypes in society and the media in particular. In the context of postmodernism, gender is seen primarily as a multi-vector feminist movement, but an important meta-problem remains gender inequality, which is particularly pronounced in the Islamic world. Bronzino and Kurmeleva, studying the problems of gender in the postmodern space of Russia, identify the main gender breakthrough of postmodernism not so much in equalizing the participation of men and women in political, economic and legal life, as in the inability to "change human consciousness", so feminism now there is "not for everyone", not for the mass consciousness, but only the one that has accepted its key postulates (Bronzino & Kurmeleva, 2017).

At the turn of the millennium, a number of studies of gender appear directly in the Islamic environment (Hatem, 2002; Maumoon, 1999). Thus, our article is directly related to research that examines the non-participation of women in the economic development of the Middle East and North Africa, because the participation of women would contribute to the entry of such countries to a new economic level. Among the reasons are the religious factor, family and patriarchal values, and "Muslim closeness", which nevertheless allows women to participate in public life "while maintaining their reputation in society," (Tausch & Heshmati, 2016).

We can conclude that "incomplete feminism", "Muslim closeness", alpha-oriented society are not destructive phenomena, but forms of specific integration of individual societies and countries in the globalized postmodern world.

According to Knights & Willmott (1997), a sociological study of even a limited sample of **postmodern** feminists provides rich material for the study of postmodernist epistemologies of representation that are currently threatened with extinction due to overly voluntaristic, individualistic, or other holistic tendencies. The main problem is that the power and structure of society are in the relationship of appearance, so feminism and other trends relevant to postmodernism may be short-lived and trendy, although they should have moved to the paradigm level.

Deconstruction of postmodernism inhibits the development of feminist psychology, because, according to scholars, it is “constructivism can be fruitfully applied to modern representations of gender in psychology, in particular to representations of gender as differences, it suggests how linguistic categories available in culture and dominant cultural ideology influence the construction of reality ” (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990). Thus, the development of gender psychology requires a constructivist approach.

The next controversy that has escalated in the postmodern era is the discrediting of the correlation between the categories of "gender" and "science". Postmodernism “criticizes” positional approaches to gender, which crystallizes only quantitatively and experimentally, and not metaphysically “Gender as a social construct, conceptually different from the “biological” division into female and male, has also been challenged by postmodern theory” (Oakley, 1998). Rehabilitation of gender issues as a subject of scientific research is currently needed. This also applies to emancipation as a feminist discourse on the "liberation" of women from all forms of discrimination.

Relevant for our study are works in which there are a correlation between feminism, postmodernism and geography (literally or figuratively). Political dialogue between feminism and postmodernism can be complete only in a geopolitical context or at least a situation. It is therefore important to study "the often hidden tensions underlying the links between geography, postmodernism and feminism, and highlighting the key issues on the border between critical human geography and feminist deconstruction" (Bondi and Domosh, 1992).

Critical racial theory also correlates with gender issues in postmodernism, as it consists of an array of partial ideologies, including women's freedom. Schneider (2004) argues that there is a constructive connection between critical racial theory and the theory of postmodernism. Its study will hypothetically allow to successfully solve the problems of social reconstruction of race, class and sex.

Interesting are the studies that believe that the two main postmodern movements, constructivism and deconstruction, can be applied to the study of sex psychology. Scientists point out: “Exploring gender theories from a constructivist point of view, we note that the main meaning of gender in psychology was the difference. The exaggeration of differences, which we call alpha bias, can be seen in approaches that focus on the contrasting experiences of men and women. Minimization of differences, beta bias, can be seen in approaches that emphasize the similarity or equality of men and

women” (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988). At the same time, deconstruction allows to reveal previously hidden gender cultural and social meanings and at the same time to go beyond the construction.

There are a number of studies that discuss existing ones and offer alternative views on gender in the context of postmodern discourse. Thus, Barratt and Straus (1989) discuss with Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1989) on the impossibility of applying the hermeneutic approach and propose to put psychoanalytic theory at the core of feminist research. Counter-arguments in their own discussions are offered by Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1989). This testifies to the fundamental openness of the methodology of gender research in the context of postmodernism.

As for gender stereotypes, on the one hand, they continue to "live" in the discourse of today's media, and on the other hand, the postmodernist deconstructive narrative leads to the alignment of female and male principles, their universalization and "blurring of distinctions" even in the positioning of secondary sexual signs. As a result - the weakening of stereotypes (Darmanto & Delliana, 2017).

This became possible, first of all, through the equalization of women's rights and the attempt to finally resolve the "women's issue" in postmodern society, which is a territory of law, freedom and opportunity. These trends have long been present in Western society, but as they move eastward, they meet “resistance” to traditions and media attitudes”, (Rosenbury, 2019). The latter prefer to use gender stereotypes to affectively approximate content and to enhance media segmentation for narrow audiences.

The main reason is the hedonistic orientation of society, in which women are stereotyped as a source of pleasure, and therefore stereotypical manipulations on the subject of femininity remain "living" in both biological and social dimensions (Greyson et al., 2010).

The above trends leave the problem of gender stereotypes in the media relevant and require the search for and generalization of tools to contain them.

### **Gender stereotypes in the mass social consciousness**

In modern world, gender studies have long since acquired the status of an academic discipline in American and European universities. For example, studies on women's issues have become part of educational and research programs in the USA, France, Great Britain, Canada and other countries. In their turn, scientific research and study of gender in academic circles in Ukraine started only in the 1990s. Based on the experience of

famous researchers, we can make a conclusion that gender issues in Ukraine have their own distinctive features.

A stereotype is a way of identification and understanding an object or situation without making one's own decisions, responsibility and opinion, but in fact an intertextual reference to archaic, mostly atavistic stamps. The hidden attitude of the psyche is to believe and accept before knowing and testing it from one's own experience. The phenomenon of stereotypes as factors of pathogenic content is explained by several factors. First of all, the ignorance of ordinary citizens plays a significant role. The problem of gender is incomprehensible to most Ukrainians, as they have simply never heard of social gender. The second reason is the old patterns of 'Soviet' vision of the institution of the family and the clear roles of women and men. In addition, in Ukraine, the media representatives use distortions of morality and religion for manipulation. Artificial morality exists, in particular, in relation to women and LGBT individuals. A separate item is the education of children on traditional patterns that is fixed in folk pedagogy and folklore. The thing that then remains forever as a toxic layer in the mind of an adult.

The different positions towards family life and the attitude of women and men towards it, which is imposed on them by the public, is a demonstrative example. This way, they teach girls to be reserved, modest, unambitious, to respect the institution of the family, while they teach boys the opposite. This shows just the basic peculiarities of gender inequality in Ukraine. Primarily, the media and advertising nourish the phenomenon of gender stereotypes in Ukrainian MCT.

Gender stereotypes in the MCT manifest themselves most brightly in advertising, where a woman plays three or four of the most common stereotypical roles. Usually only a woman-mother advertises goods for children and baby nutrition, as if the role of the father is not significant. A woman-wife and a woman-housewife advertise food, household cleaning products and appliances. And the advertising of cosmetics, perfumes, hair care products, jewellery and more demonstrates the stereotype 'a woman must be beautiful'. Advertising slogans of goods for men look eloquent and contrasting, they have an absolutely different meaning.

The studies have shown that gender discrimination in Ukrainian advertising is the rule rather than the exception. And scientists identifying themselves as supporters of the 'injection' theory of media education provide main positions to important issues of violence and sexism (Fedorov, 2001).

The analysis of a group of gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity (a certain set of characteristics answering the question of what it

means to be a man and a woman, respectively) in advertising reflects existing specific requirements for the character traits of men and women in society. The principal stereotypical social roles for women are family roles (mother and housewife), and for men - professional roles. In a career or field of activity, 'traditional' concepts suggest that women's work should belong to the emotional sphere of activity, have an executive and service features. Men are characterized by instrumental sphere; the main work is creative or managerial.

Monitoring and analysing a certain number of current commercials, slogans and campaigns leads to the conclusion that the identified gender stereotypes as about women as about men can be divided into specific comprehensible categories to better demonstrate existing sexist patterns.

Note that the two subsequent tables "Advertising stereotypes in relation to women" and "Advertising stereotypes in relation to men" (Table No. 1 and Table No. 2) were formed by us as a result of content analysis and clarification of the connotative colouring and affective approximation of the content to the predicted audience.

Thus, in the case when the heroine of advertising is a woman, the following stereotypical roles or features are offered to the audience (Table 1)

**Table 1. Advertising stereotypes about women**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Slogan</b>	<b>Brand</b>
Excessive emotionality	<i>Everything is tip-top. Heels, makeup</i>	Always
The role of mother or housewife	<i>Ideas you can't live without</i>	Tefal
	<i>And what do you do to be perfect?</i>	Max Factor
	<i>Take care of yourself!</i>	Garnier
	<i>Caring for baby</i>	Nestle
Taking care of appearance as a woman's priority feature	<i>Mum's love in every spoon</i>	Gerber
	<i>Calve. Women have their secrets</i>	Calve
	<i>I turn into a dishwasher at home</i>	Calgonit
	<i>You are the most beautiful!</i>	Gloria Jeans
	<i>Femininity is in fashion</i>	Stella Di Mare
	<i>You are always desired</i>	Mirra Lux
	<i>If you love yourself</i>	Maybeline
	<i>We are ready to go to great lengths for beauty</i>	L'oreal
	<i>Camay. Irresistible art of seduction!</i>	Camay

If the advertising hero is a man, then the viewer will get a completely different picture and opposite symbols and stereotypes in the following categories (Table 2).

**Table 2.** *Advertising stereotypes about men*

<b>Role</b>	<b>Slogan</b>	<b>Brand</b>
Confidence and authority	<i>Self-confidence</i> <i>Beer helps men find a real friend.</i> <i>Friendship as it is</i>	Mitsubishi Arsenal
Dominance, sexuality	<i>It repeats you, it conquers her</i>	Sico
Rationality, consumption and excessive freedom	<i>The power of your magnetism</i> <i>UAZ. Because, I'm a real man.</i> <i>Freedom in your character. Born free</i>	Gillette UAZ Landrover
	<i>Confident in breathing – confident in yourself</i> <i>Me and maggi. Cooking happiness at home seasoning</i> <i>Dreams come true. Housewife's dreams</i>	Eclipse Maggi «The housewife dream»

So, similar examples of popularization of stereotypes in society with the help of advertising consolidate them in real life still more. In other words, advertising dictates to people how to behave: it presents samples of 'correct' behaviour, imposes 'norms', which should be met.

In addition to the obvious gender imbalance in advertising, there is a large-scale problem in Ukraine with violations of ethical and professional norms regarding the heroines of publications, in particular, cases of stereotyping victims and the very fact of violence, which do not help combat violence against women and even covertly legitimize it.

During processing the materials and publications on the topics mentioned above, we decided it reasonable to divide the main violations of ethical norms into three general groups as follows (Table 3). This distribution was carried out on the basis of the compliance of the content with the deontological and ethical norms of journalism, in particular with respect to the use of affectively marked texts, which stimulates the reader's perception not so much of the facts as of their borderline connotations. The latter overshadows the information content and causes affect (Table No. 3). The validity of the following data was formed by a quiz the sporadic



recipients who admitted that they are readers of magazine periodicals (in the amount of 150 people of both sexes).

**Table 3.** *The main types of violations of ethical norms*

<b>Group</b>	<b>Content example</b>	<b>Media</b>
Clickbating, 'shocking headlines'	<i>A woman was raped in the middle of the street in broad daylight: a shocking video.</i> <i>A policeman raped a drunk girl and caught the whole process on the video</i> <i>Ukrainians were shocked by an impudent rape of a girl</i> <i>Appalling details of the rape and last minutes of Ternopil graduate's life</i>	<i>Obozrevatel</i>  <i>Novyny Zakarpattia</i> <i>Narodna Pravda</i>  <i>IP News</i>
Motives of outrages and retribution	<i>The victim of 'happy rape' was tested on a lie detector</i> <i>Retribution for husband's sins: in Dagestan, nine men were raping a policeman's wife for six months</i> <i>Two victims for one evening: the recidivist rapist was caught near Kharkiv</i> <i>Judge: Reimbursement of UAH 3,000 is enough punishment for ATO fighter for raping a minor</i>	<i>Depo.ua</i>  <i>IP News</i>  <i>Comments.UA</i>  <i>Hromadske informational portal</i>
Paedophilia with an accent on the sex of the victim	<i>Whose child is next: a little girl became a victim of a terrible crime in Ukraine</i>  <i>Horror in Kherson region: a step-father raped his 3-year-old daughter</i> <i>A man unnaturally raped a 10-year-old girl</i>	<i>Politeka portal</i>    <i>IP News</i>  <i>UNN</i>

Thus, according to the results of the analysis of online media publications on the topic of sexual violence, we can summarize that in each of the above examples, ethical norms are violated to a lesser or greater extent.

## Means of containing gender stereotypes

For our part, we offer several of our own developments and proposals to increase the level of media literacy and critical thinking. We divided the variants of recommendations into two categories under the general guideline - for media consumers and for creators of media products.

The first mini-project will be a gender-sensitive experiment for children aged five to seven, which can be carried out in kindergartens and primary schools. Exactly such age range should be chosen, as children begin to form their first ideas about the gender roles of men and women in the environment.

The concept of such training in the form of a game is to create a media educational situation: the teacher or mistress should propose children to draw representatives of several professions, which are stereotypically considered 'male'. For example, a surgeon, a firefighter, an airplane pilot, a programmer, etc.

In the course of drawing them, it is necessary to ask children what and how they are planning to draw, ask additional questions. According to statistics, most children have the most stereotypical view of the world from their parents, so with a very high probability, almost all will draw a man-firefighter or a man-surgeon.

On the completion, it is necessary to collect pictures and discuss each image with all the children; the audience can ask the author a question. At the end of the experiment, it would be effective to invite to the classroom women representatives of these professions in real life. The children will certainly remember this surprise effect, and the stereotyping that a woman cannot fly an aircraft will not be imprinted on their outlook from an early age. Also, invited women can talk to children, answer their questions and make them interested in this or that profession.

The next proposal, in our opinion, the communities, MCT and groups fighting against the sexualisation of women in the media should use. The most effective argument against inappropriate and degrading objectification of a woman in commercials, billboards and campaigns in general is the following practical example: if there is no objective reason (for example, if it is specifically about underwear advertising), then manipulating the consumer via sexualisation of women is discrimination regarding gender and the imposition of gender stereotypes. It is possible to fix the absurdity of the use of inappropriate sexualisation by a practical response to advertisements of this character: to mirror it completely, replacing the heroine with a hero.

Similar images or reworked commercials can be distributed on social networks or on specialized resources. With such transformations, in our opinion, it seems possible to break old and offensive stereotypes about women, thereby increasing the overall level of critical thinking among the population.

The necessity to improve the level of human media literacy in the context of information perception through different types of media led us to the idea of creating an individual universal media field, which is a well-considered and clearly formed individual selection of information sources and their application.

The first step in creating one's own media field should certainly be individual information needs. In other words, one need to calculate exactly how much time a day he spends on social networks, watching TV or studying magazines. This way, the media consumer will be able to determine his balance between: new media, the Internet, television, radio and the press. But the age and occupation, as well as hobbies, environment and circumstances can play a significant role in this choice.

That is why we think it necessary to add a second step, which will turn the media field of priorities into general recommendations. We propose to divide all media resources into exactly three global categories that are authoritative and trustworthy, that need analysis and verification, and those that one need to neglect and ignore (Table 4).

This distribution is based on the level of contamination of the rational and emotionally evaluative or intuitively unreliable component, which may be absent, partially present, or overshadow the factual knowledge with an affective connotation. This differentiation is based on a semantic analysis of facts, in particular on the ratio of referential and connotative meanings of individual words, statements and messages, the level of subjective trust and the level of media reputation with the definition "trust - do not trust" (among 150 respondents of both sexes who are active consumers media).

**Table 4.** Types of media resources by authority

<b>Authoritative</b>	<b>Need analysis</b>	<b>Ignored</b>
Has an authoritative reputation, has its own database of personal information sources, adheres to all journalistic standards, no manipulation, fakes, 'scandalous' news, etc.; does not hide its owner and sources of funding	The resource is owned by an engaged person (government agency); there were cases of spreading false information; is unpopular today; no personal database - does not produce its own information product	Regular distribution of fakes, constantly biased opinion, open manipulation of the audience; incitement to hatred; 'yellow', tabloid, scandalous news; 'clickable' headlines

According to these media criteria, the consumer will be able to make his own list of real existing media, which he will be able to safely follow and receive the necessary information without the risk of being misled or provoked.

In addition to a convenient media field, we offer every media consumer to follow a certain 'ritual' of self-survey to identify reliable information and various types of manipulation according to the following algorithm.

A compiled list of basic questions that can be a leaflet for the audience should quickly and efficiently guide a person in the media space. All questions can be divided into several conditional groups: who is the communicator, he informs through which channel, to whom and with what effect.

**Thus, the first group includes three key points:**

1. Do I trust this informational resource?
2. What do I know about it?
3. Are there any obvious 'yellow', discriminating or offensive materials in this media?

**Then we directly pay attention to the media text (TV story and so on):**

1. Does the headline correspond to the material content?
2. Are there any provocative word stamps in the title (for example, shock, sensation, scandal, etc.)?
3. What is the main goal of this media text?
4. Are there any evaluative judgments or hidden meaning?

5. Are there any references to a specific source of information (state authority, company, individual, etc.)?

**It is necessary to make conclusions regarding a communication channel as well:**

1. Is there any viral advertising on the Internet portal?
2. Is hidden advertising used?
3. Does the informational port, radio, newspaper, TV channel has the appropriate license?

**The analysis of potential audience** will also be important, because media consumer will be able to immediately identify himself by specific parameters or will not find any coincidences and address another resource:

How can one describe the target audience of this media?

For the age of which audience is the resource designed?

What population groups it can be interesting (by place of residence, profession, personal preferences)?

Finally, it is necessary to focus on **what target the media follows and what reaction of the audience does it expect:**

1. Do the materials of the source contain any manipulation of the audience?
2. Do they contain any outright lies?
3. Can the resource help incite hatred and be someone's tool in information warfare?
4. Does the resource try to speculate on the emotions of the audience?

Having such a leaflet for self-survey, one can make certain conclusions about a particular media product and information resource. Finally, by summarizing the main criteria outlined above, the media consumer will be able to independently and accurately determine whether he can trust the materials of this media resource.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, Ukrainian MCT are characterized by high level of stereotyping of gender issues which is fuelled by both: the MCT themselves and the needs of recipients. News and advertising turned to be the most pathogenic content. It is possible to reduce the destructive influence of stereotypes: a) self-regulation of MCT; b) personal media educational tools (self-survey, creation of own media field). Media education efficiency is impossible without changing the general culture and value system of the individual, which is formed in the post-Soviet state. The latter aspect requires a separate study and development of large-scale strategies to influence the masses.

The theoretical generalizations and practical recommendations offered in this article correspond to the world's leading media education issues and can be used to create a holistic view of ethical violations in social communications in the European region, which includes Ukraine.

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