

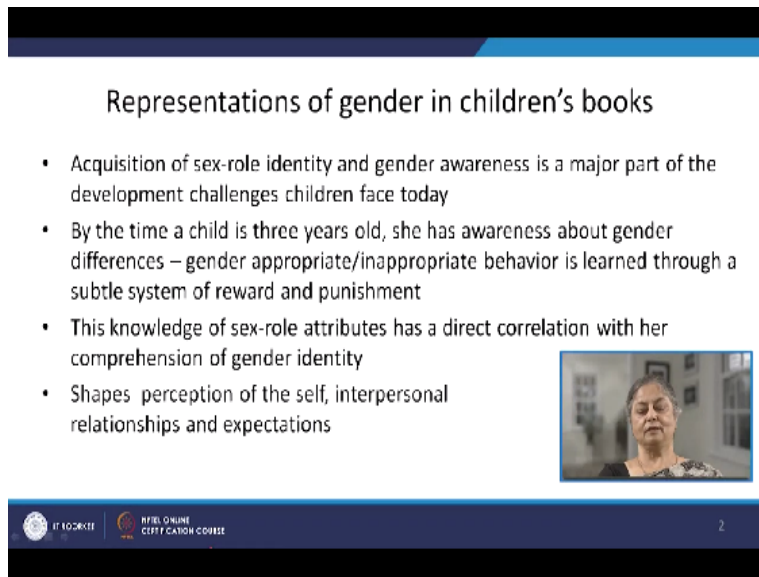
**Literature, Culture and Media**  
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**Indian Institute of Technology - Roorkee**

**Lecture – 59**  
**Media and Gender**

Welcome dear friends. We would discuss the representation of gender in children's literature and media in related fields. As far as a child's development is concerned, we find that the acquisition of sex role identity and an awareness regarding one's gender is a major part of the challenges which children are facing now and we have seen in our previous discussions by the time a child is 3-year-old, one has awareness about gender differences.

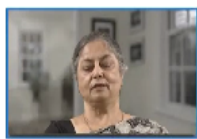
One also learns the gender appropriate or inappropriate behaviour through an ingrained system of reward and punishment which the child is able to perceive within the family.



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**Representations of gender in children's books**

- Acquisition of sex-role identity and gender awareness is a major part of the development challenges children face today
- By the time a child is three years old, she has awareness about gender differences – gender appropriate/inappropriate behavior is learned through a subtle system of reward and punishment
- This knowledge of sex-role attributes has a direct correlation with her comprehension of gender identity
- Shapes perception of the self, interpersonal relationships and expectations





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The knowledge of sex role attributes is also directly connected with the child's comprehension gender identity. The comprehension of gender identity shapes perception of the self as well as interpersonal relationships and expectations at the societal level. The instances of gender inequality can be seen in children's literature as well as a gendered portrayal of traditional role.

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- **Instances of gender inequality and their portrayal**
  - The question of underrepresentation, misrepresentation, cultural stereotyping, and dissemination of traditional gender roles
  - In most cultures children become familiar with images of men that are authoritative and physically strong, whereas those of women are passive, delicate and obedient
- **Impact on such media images on children**
  - Studies have focused on award-winning picture books
  - Greater reach and circulation, more popular
  - Picture books have a particularly strong influence—children are exposed to books at a very impressionable age
  - Majority of books published till recently reinforce traditional roles and stereotypes
  - Major feminist concern since 1970s



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There is a question of underrepresentation, misrepresentation and cultural stereotyping. And in most cultures, we find that children become familiar with these images when men are authoritative and physically strong. And where as in comparison women are passive, delicate and obedient. Such media images also leave an indelible impact on children. Several studies have been taken up which have focused on award winning picture books for children.

The award winning picture books have been taken up because there is a greater reach of them as well as a higher circulation and they are more popular also. Picture books also have a strong influence on books and children are exposed to these books at a very young and impressionable age. Majority of the books which have been published particularly during the 1960s and the year 2000 reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes. The projection of gendered images and stereotypical sex roles in children's literature has been a major feminist concern since 1970s.

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- Underrepresentation of women—appearances of females as characters, leading characters, in titles and illustrations (e.g. Weitzman et al.; Tepper and Cassidy, 1999; Hamilton et al., 2006; McCabe et al., 2011)
  - Great inequalities in the numbers of males and females characters in children's books
  - Out of 5000 children's books in the last century, 3418 had at least one male character and 2098 featured at least one female character
  - According to a study (Crisp and Hiller 2011) of award winning picture books from 1938-2011, 39 had a male protagonist as opposed to 17 books with a female protagonist
  - Recent publications demonstrate a positive trend in representation of females ( Peterson and Lach, 1990; Tepper and Cassidy, 1999)



Weitzman and others have taken up the issues related with underrepresentation of women characteristics in children's literature, appearances of female characters as leading ones in titles or in illustrations. They have suggested that there is a great inequality in the number of male and female characters in children's books. Out of 5000 children's book in the last century, 3418 had at least 1 male character and 2098 featured at least 1 female character.

According to a study by Crisp and Hiller in 2011 about the award winning picture books between 1938-2011, 39 had a male protagonist as opposed to 17 books which had a female protagonist. We can also say of course that in recent publications, there has been a positive trend as far as the representation of women protagonist are concerned.

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- Despite this, relative absence of females as characters and in titles still exists (Hamilton et al., 2006; Fitzpatrick and McPherson, 2010)
- Some have argued that studies which show more equivalence among men and women tend to only study award winning books
- Books used in schools and the ones that are read to children by parents are still marked by a dramatic underrepresentation of women (Patt and McBride, 1993; Tepper and Cassidy, 1999)
- This underrepresentation of females is reflective of the value of girls and women in society; their position and significance
- The different ways in which women and men are portrayed in the books (Weitzman et al., 1972; Anderson and Hamilton 2005)

Despite this fact, we find that the relative absence of women and females as major characters and as major title figures still exists. Critics have also suggested that studies which show more equivalence among men and women tend to only study award winning books. But we find that these are the books which are normally used in schools and these are the ones which are normally read to children by parents.

This underrepresentation of female may be considered as being reflective of the value which is given to girls and women in society. There understood position and significance in the context of different relationships. These books portray women and men in certain predefined groups which also impacts the psyche of a child.

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- Underrepresentation of females seems to teach young boys and girls that females are not as important as their male counterparts
- This gender bias in children's literature provides a sense of entitlement and privilege to the boys and it diminishes the self-image, confidence and potential of female readers (Tognoli et al., 1994, p. 278)
- Range of gender stereotypes and sexism in children's books
  - Generally female characters are passive, while males characters are active (Weitzman; Kortenhaus and Demarest, 1993; Crisp and Hiller 2011)
  - Females in need of help from males; typical damsels in distress (Weitzman, Kortenhaus and Demarest)






Underrepresentation of females seems to teach young boys and girls that somehow females are less important in comparison to their male counterparts. This gender bias in the literature of children provides a sense of entitlement and privilege to the boys and at the same time, it diminishes the self image and confidence as well as the future potential of female readers. The range of gender stereotypes and sexism in children's books is rather predictable.

Most of the women characters which are portrayed are passive whereas male characters are active. Women characters are also stereotyped either as a passive princess or as an angry witch. Major supportive characters in the form of women are by and large absent. Females are often projected as being in need of help from males and they are often depicted as typical damsels in distress.

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- Occupational stereotyping: In comparison to men, women are given a smaller number of different jobs (Hamilton et al., 2006)
  - Perpetuation of the traditional division of labor in the domestic space, unequal division of labor among couples (Weitzman et al; Anderson and Hamilton, 2005)
  - Nurturing behavior and roles are generally associated with females until very recently
  - Until 1980s and 1990s, these behaviors are solely reflected in females (Kortenhaus and Demarest; Anderson and Hamilton)
- Effects of these gender role stereotypes on children
  - Persistent exposure to conventional and traditional gender roles impact how children perceive themselves and their roles
  - Negative portrayals can affect children's self-esteem (Tsao, 2008)



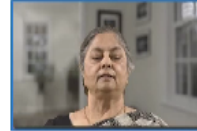


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Similarly, we find that in children's literature, the occupational stereotyping is also present. In comparison to men, women are given a smaller number of different jobs. Most of the time, they are given a domestic setting. The perpetuation of traditional division of labor in the domestic space and unequal division of labor among couples is also highlighted by the children's literature.

The nurturing roles and behaviours are normally associated with only women and it is until very recently that these behaviours were never associated with men. Very recently we find that a slight change is perceptible. A persistent exposure to conventional and traditional gender roles also impacts how children perceive themselves in the family and in the society as well as how do they perceive and imagine their future roles and contributions.

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- Hindrance in the growth of positive self-concepts (Peterson and Lach, 1990)
- Lack of strong and assertive female role models “prevent female human potential from being realized” (Tsao, 2008)
- Furthermore, the gender bias in books as well as other forms of media affects children’s abilities, interests and choices (ibid)
  - “Being faced with stereotypical portrayals of men and women at crucial periods of their development, i.e. during the time in which parents are defining their roles as parents and children are forming their expectations of them, may have a strong effect on the attitudes, expectations and behaviors of both parents and children” (Isabella Steyer 2014)



In the context of women, we find that a particularly results in a hindrance in the growth of positive self-concept. Absence of strong and assertive female role models prevents young girls from realizing their potential in the later life. At the same time, we find that the gender bias which is reflected in various other ways in the books and other forms of media also effects the abilities, interests and choices.

It is pertinent to quote from Isabella Steyer here who suggests "being faced with stereotypical portrayals of men and women at crucial periods of their development, i.e. during the time in which parents are defining their roles as parents and children are forming their expectations of them, may have a strong effect on the attitudes, expectations and behaviours of both parents and children." So we can say that children's stories do not only impact the psyche of young children. But the way parents behave with them is also determined to certain extent by these stories.

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- Studies have pointed at difficulties which slightly older children have in empathizing with those stories which do not portray conventional gender roles – independent female characters, non-aggressive males
- Identifications and understandings of children are determined by their acquaintances with a particular discourse
- Responses are culturally conditioned
- Familiarity with unconventional gender images is essential in order to augment children's resistance to dominant gendered messages in storylines



Studies have also pointed out at the difficulties which is faced by slightly older children in empathizing with those stories which do not portray conventional gender roles. A young child who has been exposed to only those picture books and stories in which the gender roles have been portrayed in a conventional manner would find it very difficult to empathise with independent female characters or for that matter with those males who are non-aggressive.

The identifications and understandings of young children are determined by the level of their acquaintance with a particular type of discourse. We can say that the responses of these young children to various narratives is also culturally conditioned. Therefore, a familiarity with those gender images which are open, unbiased and unconventional is essential to augment children's resistance to dominant gender messages which are hidden in the storylines of these texts.

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- Clara Bartholomaeus, "Girls can like boy toys': junior primary school children's understandings of feminist picture books"

The importance of engaging with children's understandings was particularly evident in a study by Wason-Ellam ... who found that children did not take up the subversive messages in the books with 'liberated female characters' that she shared with them. Instead, the seven and eight-year-old girls privileged beauty in female characters and the books sparked conversations about favorite popstars and soap opera characters, with a focus on beauty, clothing, and heterosexual attractiveness. Rather than ignoring these readings, Wason-Ellam argues it is important to engage with them and the meaning they hold to girls, while offering them alternative constructions of gender.

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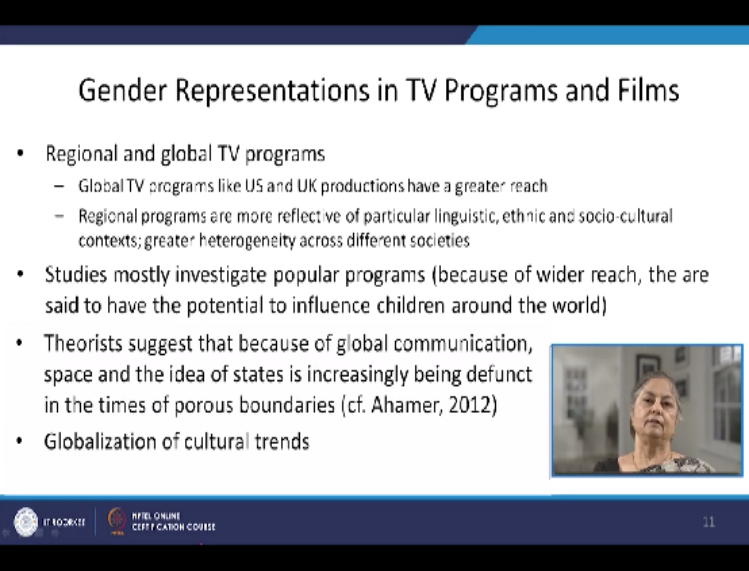
The idea that the level of exposure which a very young child has had to a particular type of storyline and thereby to a particular type of gender narrative is further reinforced by an incident which has been taken up by Clara Bartholomaeus. Clara Bartholomaeus in her paper, "Girls can like boy toys," is based on a certain study conducted at the level of junior primary school. She refers to a study which has been taken by Wason-Ellam in one of the Australian schools.

And I quote, the importance of engaging with children's understandings was particularly evident in this study who found that children did not take up the subversive messages in the books with liberated female characters that she shared with them. Instead, the 7 and 8-year-old girls privileged beauty in female characters and the books sparked conversations about favourite popstars and soap opera characters, with a focus on beauty, clothing and heterosexual attractive.

Rather than ignoring these readings, Wason-Ellam argues it is important to engage with them and the meaning they hold to girls, while offering them alternative constructions of gender. So we can understand that the exposure at the level of early childhood is responsible for creating a particular type of gender awareness in young children. By the time a child reaches the preteen or even an earlier stage, the child has a fixed notion of what is a gender appropriate behaviour.

And therefore, it is necessary to expose the child to different type of constructions of gender through storybooks and similar media exposures.

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The slide is titled "Gender Representations in TV Programs and Films". It contains the following bullet points:

- Regional and global TV programs
  - Global TV programs like US and UK productions have a greater reach
  - Regional programs are more reflective of particular linguistic, ethnic and socio-cultural contexts; greater heterogeneity across different societies
- Studies mostly investigate popular programs (because of wider reach, they are said to have the potential to influence children around the world)
- Theorists suggest that because of global communication, space and the idea of states is increasingly being defunct in the times of porous boundaries (cf. Ahamer, 2012)
- Globalization of cultural trends


A small video inset on the right side of the slide shows a woman with dark hair, wearing a patterned top, looking directly at the camera. The slide footer includes the logos for "IT KOOBEE" and "HYEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE", along with the number "11".

The representation of gender in TV programs and films can also be sighted in the same way. Regional and global TV programs can be differentiated with at this stage. The regional programs are more reflective of a particular linguistic, ethnic and socio-cultural contexts and therefore, we find that they may also display a certain heterogeneity across different societies. On the other hand, we find that global TV programs like a production house of US or UK have a greater reach.

But at the same time, they suggest a less heterogeneous approach towards these differences. Even though the studies have mostly investigated popular programs because of their wider reach, it is suggested that they may have a potential to influence children round the globe. Theorists suggest that because of global communication, space and ideas of states is increasingly being defunct in the times of porous boundaries. And the cultural trends are also becoming globalized.

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- Findings of studies on movies and television series are similar to studies of children's books.
  - Underrepresented of women in different kinds of TV series and movies
  - In animated cartoons from 1930s to 1990s, on an average female characters accounted for a mere 16.4% of all characters
  - Negative trend for female representation from the 1930s to 1960s
  - Female representation increased a great deal from the 1960s
  - Male-female ratio of 2.6:1 in 101 G-rated popular films from US and Canada from 1990 to 2005 (Smith et al., 2010)
  - Similar underrepresentation of women in other preceding studies (Sternberg and Serbin, 1974; Thompson and Zerbinos, 1995; Faherty, 2001)

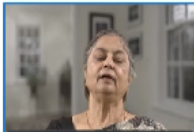


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Because of that we can also say that findings of studies on movies and television series are similar to the findings of studies of children's books. The underrepresentation of women in different kinds of TV series and movies is there. In animated cartoons between 1930s to 1990s on an average female characters accounted for a mere 16.4% of all characters. At the same time, the representation of female body is rather negative. And the male-female ratio is also skewed. Similar underrepresentation of women can be seen in other preceding studies too.

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- Alarming to note that despite claims of gender equality, there was no change in the male-female ratio in films from 1900-2005 (Smith et al., 2010)
- Portrayal of Male and Female Characters
  - Women are more physically attractive than males (Cgletree et al., 2004; Klein and Shiffman, 2009; Smith et al., 2010)
  - Impossible standards of beauty imposed on female audiences; hypersexualization and eroticization of female bodies
  - Similar sexist portrayals and misrepresentations as seen in children's books



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It is alarming to note that despite claims of gender equality, there has been no change in the male-female ratio in films between 1900 to 2005. In the portrayal of male and female characters of the movies during this time taken up by Smith et al, we find that women are projected as being

more physically attractive in comparison to men as well as women are being projected with an almost impossible to attain standards of beauty, a hypersexualization and eroticization of female bodies is also very much apparent in films and other media.

We find that in children's books also similar sexist portrayal and misrepresentation is often seen.

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- Effect of male portrayals in films/TV on boys
  - Females are shown in traditional roles—as mothers, wives, girlfriends; domestic space is glorified
  - More male characters as bachelors or singles; lack of positive role models in terms of relationships or fatherhood (Smith et al., 2010)
  - Hegemonic masculinity is emphasized: successful males as primary financial care-givers, physically strong, emotionally aloof etc., leads to emulation of these qualities in boys
  - Impact of toy commercials which advertise toys for boys and girls based on traditional notions of femininity and masculinity
  - Dolls, kitchen sets for girls; guns, cars, train sets for boys

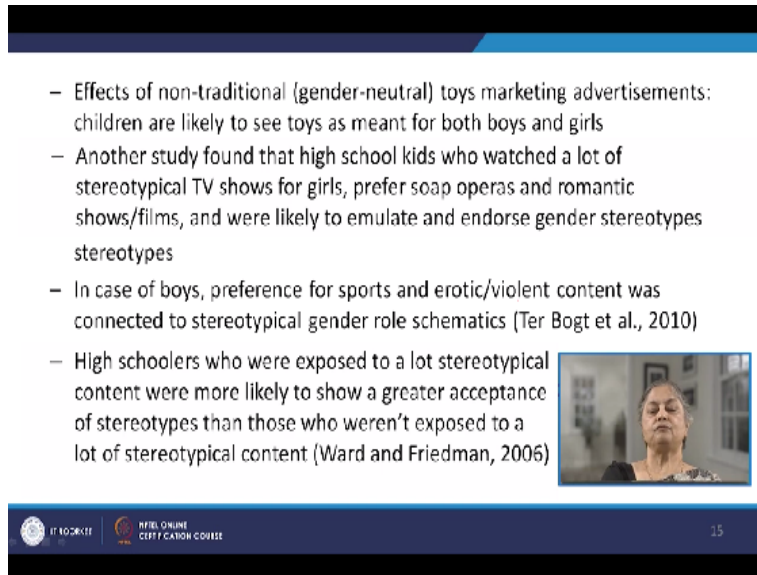
When we talk of the portrayal of gender images and body shapes, etc., we do not only refer to the representation of a female figure. But we find that the effect of male portrayals in films and TVs is also rather negative on boys. The representation of men and women in media is normally done in traditional roles. Women are shown in domestic space. For example, as mothers, wives, girlfriends, etc.

Whereas more male characters are shown either as bachelors or singles and there is a lack of positive role models in terms of different relationships or fatherhood particularly. Hegemonic masculinity is emphasized through these media representation and successful male is shown as being primary financial care-giver, physically strong as well as emotionally aloof.

The representation leads to emulation of these qualities in boy hindering their balance growth also at a later stage. The impact of toy commercials which advertise toys for boys and girls is also based on traditional notions of femininity and masculinity. For example, dolls and kitchen

sets are still considered to be a preferable choice for girls whereas guns, cars, train sets, mechanical sets are considered to be the normal choice for boys.

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– Effects of non-traditional (gender-neutral) toys marketing advertisements: children are likely to see toys as meant for both boys and girls

– Another study found that high school kids who watched a lot of stereotypical TV shows for girls, prefer soap operas and romantic shows/films, and were likely to emulate and endorse gender stereotypes

– In case of boys, preference for sports and erotic/violent content was connected to stereotypical gender role schematics (Ter Bogt et al., 2010)

– High schoolers who were exposed to a lot stereotypical content were more likely to show a greater acceptance of stereotypes than those who weren't exposed to a lot of stereotypical content (Ward and Friedman, 2006)



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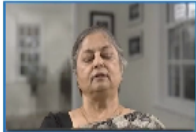
The effect of traditional as well as non-traditional and gender neutral toys and related advertisements can be seen on the psyche of the young children also. In gender neutral toys, we find that children are more likely to see toys as toys instead of linking them with a particular gender. In case of boys also, their preference for sports and erotic or violent content was connected to stereotypical gender role schematics.



It encourage them to be violent and aggressive in their behaviour towards others. High school students who were exposed to a lot stereotypical content were more likely to show a greater acceptance of stereotypes than those who were not exposed to a lot of stereotypical content.

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## Gender, IT-related programs and Video Games

- Global influence: particularly in the case of video games and internet
- Similar underrepresentation, misrepresentation and traditional representations of females in a variety of online content and video games
- Educational software
  - Highly rated and popular educational software for young kids have more male central characters than females (Sheldon, 2004)
  - Female characters are less likely to exhibit stereotyped behavior; but showed more gender stereotypical appearances than males
- Video games
  - Stark underrepresentation: only 14% female characters (Downs and Smith, 2010)





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This can also be seen in IT related programs and in video games also. Global influence of gender stereotypes can be particularly seen in the case of video games and internet media. In the case of video games, we find that there is a similar underrepresentation, misrepresentation and traditional representation of females in a variety of online content as well as in video games. In educational software, we find that highly rated and popular educational software for young kids have more male central characters than females.

And female characters are less likely to exhibit stereotype behaviour, but at the same time, they showed more gender stereotypical appearances than males. So indirectly we find that a gender hierarchy is being projected even through educational software. In video games, we find that there is a stark underrepresentation of women. And there are only 14% female characters in different video games.

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- Female video characters are presented in highly sexual ways—thin, scantily clad, figure hugging attire
  - In contrast, emphasis on masculine stereotypes like athleticism, aggression, risk-taking, rescue
- Studies have documented correlations between children's development of the sense of self based on their exposure to gender based portrayals in video games, computer content
  - A study demonstrates that exposure to highly eroticized video games' heroines, negatively impacted female self-efficacy (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro, 2009)
  - In case of boys, several kinds of internet use positively associated with sexual stereotyping (Ter Bogt et al., 2010); for girls, internet use was negatively associated with gender stereotypes
  - Greater exposure to counter-stereotypical, empowering and assertive role models for both the genders can positively influence people's attitude to gender roles (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro, 2009)

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When we look at the character portrayal in video games, we find that female characters are presented in highly sexual ways. They are being presented as thin, scantily clad, or wearing a figure hugging attire. In contrast to this, we find that in the portrayal of men, there is an emphasis on masculine stereotypes like athleticism, aggression, risk-taking behaviour, rescuing others, etc. Studies have also documented that there is a direct correlation between children's development of the sense of self and their exposure to gender based portrayals in video games and computer content, etc.

A study conducted amongst undergraduates demonstrated that exposure to highly eroticised video games, heroines, negatively impacted the sense of being self-efficient amongst girls. In case of boys, several kinds of internet use positively was associated with sexual and gendered stereotyping. For girls, the similar type of use was negatively associated as far as gender stereotyping was concerned.

A greater exposure to counter stereotypical, empowering and assertive role models for both the genders is significant because it would be able to positively influence people's attitudes towards gender roles.

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## Changing Times?

- Although many concerns remain about how women are represented in media, there are signs that things are changing
- Roles for women on television and in films, in particular, have become much more varied and complex in the last decade, ranging from independent, assertive female characters.
- Complex female characters; a shift away from the traditional 'good' versus 'bad' woman. E.g. *The Game of Thrones*
- Female-oriented/centric shows/films
- Exploration of themes and roles which go beyond gender stereotypes
- Exploration of specifically female perspective concerns



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Although many concerns remain about how women are being represented in media. Still there are signs that things are changing now. Even though the roles for women on television and in films are by and large stereotypical, but at the same time, we find that in the last decade particularly, the portrayal of women has become more complex and more varied ranging from independent and assertive female characters to elderly and independent women.

There is a certain complexity in female characters also and there is a shift away from the traditional good versus bad woman, the fairy princess versus the angry witch. For example, we can look at the character portrayals of women in the popular show *The Game of Thrones*. We find that more and more female oriented and female centric shows and films are being made and there is an exploration of those themes and roles which go beyond gender stereotypes and project men as well as women opting for those roles which are not considered traditional or conventional for them.

At the same time, we find that various TV programs and films are being made to explore those perspectives which are specifically female.

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- A strange case of rom-coms/soap operas: More female characters placed in traditional gender roles, emphasis on domesticity, romance and marriage are central to the development arc of a female character even if she is presented as independent and modern
- Benevolent sexism as dangerous as outright sexism in media
- Studies show that egalitarian representations of gender roles, behavior, attitudes bring positive changes in the audiences
- Greater exposure to gender-neutral norms and expectations in different kinds of media influences children to adopt and emulate the norms reflected



However, we find that there is a strange contradiction which exists here. Particularly in the context of rom-coms or the soap operas. More female characters are placed in traditional gender roles and there is an emphasis on domesticity, romance and marriage. And these aspects of a female personality are considered to be central to the development as far as the arc of a female character is concerned.

So women may be presented as being an independent and modern one, but still we find that there is an emphasis on domesticity, romance and marriage as far as the story of the development of her character is concerned. It can be easily pointed out here that this benevolent sexism is as dangerous as outright sexism in media. So a diluted water down version of gender independence becomes meaningless.

Studies also show that egalitarian representations of gender roles, behaviours and attitudes bring about a positive change in the audience. So an exposure to gender neutral norms and expectations in different kind of media influences young children and adults to adopt and emulate the norms which they have been exposed to.

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## Teen Magazines

- Teen magazines are also getting a makeover
- Although stories like “The perfect boyfriend—three ways to find him” , “Eight things that men appreciate in women”, “How to attain the perfect beach body” continue to grace the cover of women’s magazines; features inside are expanding beyond the requisite beauty tips and fashion spreads
- Features in cosmopolitan and other magazines on female sexual pleasure and desire
- Discussion on career options and opportunities : the needs of modern and independent women
- Most fashion magazines continue to sell the beauty myth : the token gesture of plus size modelling



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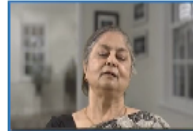
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Teen magazines are also getting a makeover and this change has happily started in the last two decades only. Even though we find that the traditional stories still continue to grace the cover of women's magazines. For example, *The Perfect Boyfriend*, *Three Ways to Find Him*, etc. There are certain features inside which are expanding beyond the traditional beauty trips and fashion spreads.

And there are features on female sexual pleasures and desires. There are discussions on their career options and financial opportunities which are considered to be the need of a modern and independent women. Even though we find that most fashion magazines continue to sell the beauty myth, but at the same time, we find that there is a gesture even though it may be a token gesture of plus size modelling which is included in the content now.

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- Christina Kelly, editor of YM magazine, made headlines when she announced that the magazine would no longer run stories on dieting and would include pictures of bigger models.
  - Media activist Jean Kilbourne applauded the move, saying, "Any magazine that purports to be for girls and young women, dieting has no place in it. This is a step in the right direction... It would be wonderful if some other magazine editors would be equally as courageous."
- French Government Policies
- Depictions of male roles are also changing – very gradually. Men are also being portrayed in nurturing roles, which were previously given to women only
- Social acceptance and change!?



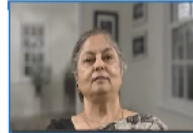
Christina Kelly, editor of YM magazine, made headlines when she announced that the magazine would no longer run stories on dieting and would include pictures of bigger size models. French government has also initiated policy directives in which they have banned the portrayal of unnaturally thin female figures in positive light. The depiction of male roles is also changing, even though this change is very gradual.

But men are also being increasingly portrayed in nurturing roles those roles which were given previously to women only. So one can say that as the society is changing and moving towards a better understanding, gradual change in the level of social acceptance of different gender roles has also started to be portrayed on the media.

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## Advertisements

- Advertising is beginning to change, if more slowly.
- In the late 1990s, cereal giant Kellogg released an ad campaign for Special K which used pictures of older and larger women, and copy such as “the *Ashantis* of Ghana think a woman’s body gets more attractive as she ages. Please contact your travel agent for the next available flight”
- The ads attracted such positive attention that in 1999 they were followed up by a TV campaign
- Traditional advertisements continue to target middle aged women from a variety of backgrounds and serve to reinforce age old notions of a woman’s place in the home and family



The advertisements have also started to change slowly. Even though this change is very slow, it is almost imperceptible and most of the time, it is overshadowed by conventional advertisement methods. We can refer to a late 1990s advertisement of the cereal giant Kellogg which initiated a campaign for Special K using pictures of older and larger women and a copy such as “The *Ashantis of Ghana* think a woman's body gets more attractive as she ages. Please contact your travel agent for the next available flight”.

These advertisements attracted such a positive attention that in 1999, they were followed up by a similar type of a TV campaign. Traditional advertisements continue to target middle aged women from a variety of backgrounds and serve to reinforce age old notions of a woman's place in the home and family. Still things have started to change very slowly.

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- At times the lines between these broad characterizations blur and there is crossover, signifying a change in the way society divides its various age and class based segments
- Also, the huge increase in advertisements over the past half century or so has in some ways increased the options women have, but overall has the extremely detrimental effect of objectifying women as something to be lusted after and acquired
- While probably not the cause per se, advertisements like these reflect and condone regressive notions which lead to such shocking prevalence of rapes, harassment, and other forms of abuse against women



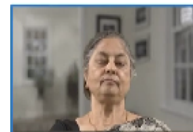
At times the lines between these broad characterizations blur and there is a crossover, signifying a change in the way society divides its various age and class based segments. The huge increase in advertisements over the past half century or so has in some ways increased the options women have had traditionally in the society. But overall, we find that they have had an extremely detrimental effect of objectifying women as something to be lusted after and acquired.

The advertisements like these reflect and condone regressive notions which lead to shocking prevalence of harassment, rape and similar type of abuse against women.

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### Indian Context

- There is no doubt that India has changed dramatically in terms of economics, government, and certain other aspects of culture since independence and the trend of a growing middle class and slowly growing liberal values among such a class is on the rise
- It awaits to be seen whether liberalization becomes a more widespread phenomenon, or whether the strong tug of tradition and the reality of a poor and rural citizens leads to the upholding of traditional gender roles. Strong leanings towards modernization among girls and parents
- The state of Indian women in advertising today is a mixed bag of progress and challenge

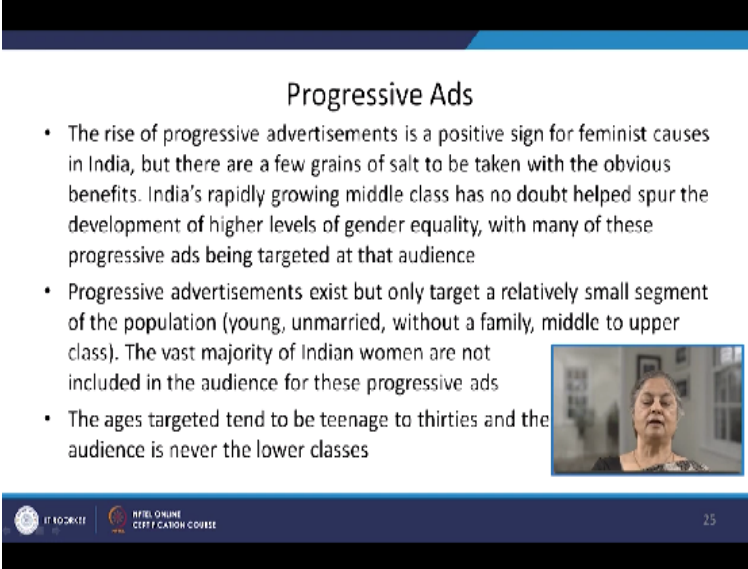


In the Indian context particularly, we can see that both these trends are perceptible. After

independence, our country has changed dramatically in terms of economics, government, and certain other aspects of culture. And there is a trend of a growing middle class and slowly growing liberal values among such a class are on the rise.

Still it is yet to be seen whether this process of liberalization becomes a more widespread phenomenon or whether the strong tug of tradition and the reality of a poor and rural citizens would lead to the upholding of traditional gender roles. Still we can see that normally there are strong leanings towards modernization among young girls and their parents. The state of Indian women in advertising today is also a mixed bag of progress and challenge.

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The slide is titled "Progressive Ads" and contains three bullet points. To the right of the text is a small video thumbnail showing a woman speaking. At the bottom of the slide, there are logos for "IT TO OXITE" and "NRIEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE", along with the number "25".

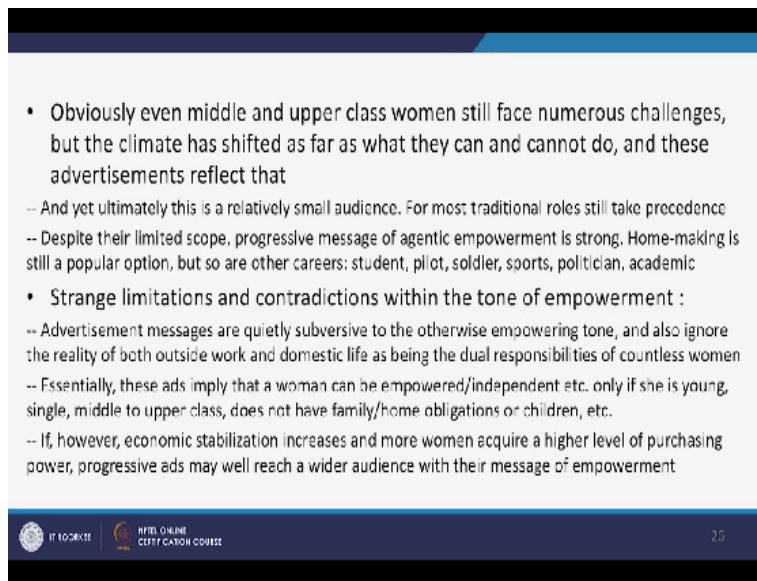
### Progressive Ads

- The rise of progressive advertisements is a positive sign for feminist causes in India, but there are a few grains of salt to be taken with the obvious benefits. India's rapidly growing middle class has no doubt helped spur the development of higher levels of gender equality, with many of these progressive ads being targeted at that audience
- Progressive advertisements exist but only target a relatively small segment of the population (young, unmarried, without a family, middle to upper class). The vast majority of Indian women are not included in the audience for these progressive ads
- The ages targeted tend to be teenage to thirties and the audience is never the lower classes

A streak of progressive advertisements is discernible in the scene of Indian advertisement. Even though there are a few grains of salt to be taken with the obvious benefits, India's rapidly growing middle class has definitely helped the development of higher levels of gender equality with many of these progressive advertisements being targeted at that audience.

The progressive advertisements exist but they so far largely target only a relatively small segment of the population that is the young, unmarried, without a family, middle to upper class women. The vast majority of Indian women are not included in the audience for these progressive ads. The ages targeted tend to be teenage to 30s and the audience is never the lower class audience.

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- Obviously even middle and upper class women still face numerous challenges, but the climate has shifted as far as what they can and cannot do, and these advertisements reflect that
  - And yet ultimately this is a relatively small audience. For most traditional roles still take precedence
  - Despite their limited scope, progressive message of agentic empowerment is strong. Home-making is still a popular option, but so are other careers: student, pilot, soldier, sports, politician, academic
- Strange limitations and contradictions within the tone of empowerment :
  - Advertisement messages are quietly subversive to the otherwise empowering tone, and also ignore the reality of both outside work and domestic life as being the dual responsibilities of countless women
  - Essentially, these ads imply that a woman can be empowered/independent etc. only if she is young, single, middle to upper class, does not have family/home obligations or children, etc.
  - If, however, economic stabilization increases and more women acquire a higher level of purchasing power, progressive ads may well reach a wider audience with their message of empowerment

It is true that even middle and upper class women face numerous challenges but the climate has shifted as far as what they can and cannot do and these advertisements reflect that. And yet ultimately one should not forget that the target audience is still relatively small. For most women, we find that the traditional roles still take precedence and this is also reflected in the contemporary media and advertisement.


Despite their limited scope, progressive message of a genetic empowerment is also strong. Even though the advertisements most of the time suggest that homemaking is still a popular option. But they also try to focus on other careers as being similarly important the careers of a student, pilot, soldier, sports person, politician, or an academic. Still we find that there are strange limitations as well as contradictions within the tone of empowerment suggested by these advertisements.

These messages are quietly subversive to the otherwise empowering tone and also ignored the reality of both outside and domestic work as being the dual responsibilities of countless women in India. Essentially, these ads seem to imply that a women can be empowered, can be independent, etc., only if she is young, single, middle to upper class, does not have family or home obligations or the responsibility of children, etc.

If however, economic stabilization increases and more and more women acquire a higher level of purchase power, progressive advertisements may well reach a wider audience with their message of empowerment.

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- New ads for Nirma washing powder
  - Nirma switched from portraying women as home-makers to women as change-makers, and also displays women as powerful and active in the face of male impotence or unwillingness.
  - In a marked contrast to earlier Nirma ads, this one has a very strong message of female empowerment
  - Four women in beautiful clean outfits come across an ambulance stuck in the mud. A crowd of mostly male onlookers is passively watching or even filming the incident, unwilling to get themselves dirty to help the ambulance get out.
  - The four women however plunge into the muck and together they push the ambulance out before walking off triumphantly, knowing that all the grime they are now covered in will be removed by Nirma washing powder



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It is interesting and tempting to refer to a particular ad for Nirma washing powder. Nirma which happens to be a major brand as far as washing powders in India are concerned, has switched from portraying women as homemakers to women as change makers. And displays women as powerful and active in the face of male impotence or male unwillingness. In a marked contrast to previous Nirma ads, one of the recent advertisements of Nirma has a very strong message of female empowerment.



It exhibits four women dressed in beautiful queen outfit coming across an ambulance which has been stuck in the mud. A crowd of mostly male onlookers is either passively watching or filming the incident but it is unwilling to get themselves dirty to help the ambulance get out. These four women immediately plunge into the mud and together they are able to push the ambulance out before walking off triumphantly, knowing that all the grime they are now covered in would be removed by Nirma washing powder.

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- Advts of other washing powders – women in offices
- New jewellery ads
  - Target young female professionals who don't need parents or husbands to buy them jewellery
  - Breaking taboos: *tonishq* wedding jewellery ad: portrays the marriage of a woman with a young girl from a previous marriage/relationship
- Advertisements for Indian Government Schemes for social awareness
  - There is a strong message of empowering rural women in terms of mobility and activity
  - And of empowering single, urban, middle to upper class women to pursue their goals, whatever they may be (even if that means the armed forces- previously a taboo, traditionally male-dominated field)
  - Ads of mobile/cells, Bank accounts



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At the same time, we find that there are certain other changes in the tone of advertisement. More and more advertisements are showing women now in offices. In the jewellery advertisements also, we find that the target group is also now including the young female professionals who do not need either parents or husbands to buy them jewellery and whose purchasing power has been increased.

In comparison to these various advertisements, we find that the advertisements for different Indian government schemes for social awareness are able to focus on almost all the audience groups and segments of women, rural as well as urban educated as well as uneducated. There is a strong message of empowering rural women in terms of mobility and creativity in these advertisements for Indian government schemes.

They are about empowering single, urban, middle to our upper class women to pursue their goals, whatever they may be, even if that means the armed forces which was considered to be previously a taboo and which is still a traditional and male dominated field. At the same time, we find that these advertisements which create awareness about the use of mobile and cell phones, about bank accounts and related financial matters are able to incorporate more and more women in their fold.

So we find that even though the gender parameters are still prevalent in different types of media,

things have started to change. Thank you.