Chapter Title: Gender representations in the media and the importance of critical media literacy

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This chapter examines gender as constructed, represented and reproduced in mass media texts of print, television, film, and popular music. We examine gender representations and stereotypes in popular western mass media. Production practices that create gender positioning and audience choice of media texts and their response to gender representations are also examined alongside. Importantly, we look at the complexities of engaging with media literacy and the deeper notions of critical media literacy. The questions we ask are: Is media literacy an act of critical reading of print and audiovisual texts, critical viewing of television, films, or advertising? Or, does it encompass all of the above *and* also move toward a critical, reflective, indeed, autonomous stance, so that viewers and readers can gain greater control over the complex ideological and discursive influences exerted by media? The chapter begins with a brief definition and history of media literacy, proceeds to examine stereotypes in the media, and concludes by highlighting the importance of a critical reading practice.

Defining media literacy

Media literacy had its beginnings in the 1930s in Great Britain with the aim to educate the general public, starting with school-aged children, against the potential dangers of the new mass media. At the same time, the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research applied ‘critical theory’ to the study of media which provided the first Marxist analysis of media as controlled by ruling

class interests. The Frankfurt School critiqued and analyzed various aspects of media from print texts to radio and early TV, to production processes. The Frankfurt School also pioneered analysis of mass media culture by arguing that the mass media, particularly radio in the 1940s and TV by the early 1950s, subjected audiences to passive acceptance of dominant ideologies. Key theorists of the Frankfurt School were Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno (1973), Herbert Marcuse (1972) and, later, Jurgen Habermas (2001), all of whom took a broadly pessimistic view of the media and 'culture industries', a term coined by Adorno and Horkheimer.

In the 1950s Roland Barthes, drawing on Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralism, developed semiotic methods to analyze the meanings of cultural products and practices, and popular culture in a variety of forms, from advertising to sports. Terming popular culture artifacts *mythologies,* Barthes illustrated how everyday cultural objects accrue meanings, or connotations, that operate as signs beyond their object level surface function: for example, a Mercedes or VW Kombi function as cars, as modes of transport but the Mercedes connotes upper class status for its owners whereas the Kombi, at least in the 1960s, signified an alternative lifestyle to normative, bourgeois middle class status. In that regard, Barthes argued that media mythologies also function to counteract the normative cultural objects and meanings of the ruling class. In the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan coined the famous phrases 'the medium is the message' and 'the global village' by arguing that mass media

forms such as film, television or radio, or the genre of advertising produce new aesthetics that have global impact. In short, he argued that the choice of medium determines the meaning of a message and that those meanings will have a global impact in light of the 'world community' enabled by TV. For example, the material object of soap will connote different meanings whether it is in a scientific print article on soap, a black and white print ad for 'beauty soap' in a magazine, a visually dynamic color TV ad, or its association to daytime TV 'soap operas': the medium is the message. McLuhan (1964) was instrumental in drawing attention to the need for studying media effects and he can, in fact, be considered as a precursor to media literacy theory, since he argued strongly that media should be regarded as an agent of change.

In the 1970s, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCCS) adopted a Marxist Gramcisian approach to the study of ideologies embedded in the culture industries by examining race, class and gender representations in media texts. The Centre also proposed studies on audience reception theory and, between the 1970s and 1980s, engaged in critiquing dominant culture that promoted ideologies of gender, sexism and homophobia. Further, BCCCS provided in-depth analysis of cultural forms such as media, and proposed audience reception theory to analyze forms of resistance. The BCCCS Group, which included Stuart Hall (1973) and Angela McRobbie (1991), argued that meaning making is determined by the social, cultural and economic circumstances of the reader/viewer. Accordingly, media texts do not

impose dominant ideology on the reader, but provide perspectives or 'reading paths' for the reader/viewer to negotiate and co-construct. The Group insisted on the power audiences have in the dynamic reading of texts through meaning making and critical analysis. This position stood in sharp contrast to earlier Frankfurt School assumptions about audiences as passive consumers in a linear, one-dimensional relationship with media texts.

Media literacy, then, has had a long history and tradition. It began with recognition of media as cultural artifacts, studying audience response by engaging in reflective questioning of representations and choice of programs, and developing concepts of the active, resistant viewer. This was the foundation for moves to incorporate media studies in schools in order to increase young people's literacy in those media in which they invest substantial amounts of time. More recently, moving away from 'ideology critique', the 1990s saw a focus on production practices as well as on the economic bases of media production, the technologies and professional practices that underpin production, and issues of power in the consumption/production relationship (Buckingham, 2003; Louw, 2001).

We now turn to outline some of the more salient definitions of media literacy as conceptualized by media theorists during the last decade. As Kellner (1995) noted, while the Frankfurt School set out a "powerful critique of cultural industries" (p. xiv), they did not develop theories for resisting

media artifacts. Media literacy involves gaining knowledge, and critical competencies, through understanding the various forms of media representations (Kellner, 1995; Kellner & Share, 2005a; C. Luke, 1994a; Luke, 2003a & 2003b; Messaris, 1998). As Kellner and Share (2005b) argue media literacy enables people to "use media intelligently, to discriminate and evaluate media content" (p. 5).

As Kellner and Share (2005a) observe, media profoundly determine peoples' reading of the world and impact on how knowledge about the world is constructed. Adams and Hamm (2000), Aufderheide (1997), Desmond (1997), Hobbs (1998), Sholle and Denski (1995), define media literacy as skills comprised of analysis, evaluation and understanding of conventions of representation and their ideological political implications. According to Potter (2001), "media literacy is a perspective that we actively use when exposing ourselves to the media in order to interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter" (p. 4).

Media literacy may counteract the negative effects of media such as television (Buckingham, 1993a, 1993b), help individuals make decisions regarding media choices and interpretations (Hobbs, 1997), and "help people become sophisticated citizens rather than sophisticated consumers" (Lewis & Jhally, 1998, p. 109). Thus, since Masterman's (1985) well known *Teaching the media,* where the concept of media as symbolic system (1997, p. 28) is

developed, a number of concepts and practices of media literacy have been adopted. Further, the urgency of engaging with media literacy is underpinned by "widespread critical media consciousness in a period of unprecedented media expansion and development" (Masterman, 1997, p. 67).

Critical media literacy — a step forward

In a broad sense, as noted by Potter (2001, p. 370), "media literacy is a perspective", one that aims to make readers/viewers selective and critical and employ these skills in their own production practices (Luke, 2003b). Beyond this broad perspective, critical media literacy develops analytic skills through critical comprehension and provides critical understanding of the pragmatics of text use and the socio-cultural contexts of texts.

Critical media literacy evolved from a sociological approach and, as noted by Alvermann, Moon and Hagood (1999), Luke (1997a), Kellner and Share (2005a), develops a critical understanding of the social, cultural, economic and political positioning of individuals in their engagement with popular media. Buckingham (1998), Kellner (1995), Kellner and Share (2005a) and Luke (1998), critique Fiske's (1989) idea that the reader/audience tendency to resist the effect of popular media is a natural response. According to these critics, critical media literacy is a conscious attempt to develop awareness of the practices of the media in readers who can then be expected to assume agentive positions in adopting and resisting a given textual stance. Thus, critical media literacy is holistic and embraces a study of language, text

and image, and also of the social values, and social and cultural knowledges of media users (Buckingham, 1993a 1993b; Luke, 1997a, 2003a; Watts-Pailliotet, 2001; Semali & Watts-Pailliotet, 1999).

Kellner and Share (2005a) provide key concepts that underpin the study of media. According to them, the study of media is critical to understand that all messages are constructed; that students require the skills, curriculum space and encouragement to distinguish connotations from denotations because media representations seem 'natural' when these are conflated; and that attention to audience response is imperative because it provides an epistemological standpoint and enables reception to be seen as a site of cultural struggle and meaning making. Finally, critical thinking around dominant discourses is of primary significance to understanding media.

While media literacy has been around since the 1970s, in Australia, there has been a strong focus on integrating media literacy from primary years through to high school (Kubey, 2003). Since the 1990s, the focus of school-based media literacy particularly in Australia has drawn on the notion of the four resources model of literacy. Developed by Freebody and Luke (1990), and Luke and Freebody (2003), the four resources model when applied to media literacy illustrates the significance of recognizing fundamental aspects of media texts. The four roles or resources enable the 'cracking' of media codes and conventions, situating media texts as contextual social and cultural

artifacts and practices, developing awareness of the social and cultural purposes and ideologies that underpin media texts, and identifying exclusions and inclusions inherent in these texts (see Freebody & Luke, 2003, p. 57). These resources facilitate the application of students' prior knowledge to construct meaning of media representations; enable comprehension of the complex meanings embedded in media texts which are mediated by the social and cultural contexts of the user. Notably, the model foregrounds the intent and implications of the text to the user, the situatedness of text and reader/viewer in particular contexts, and underscores the importance of critical analysis and critical literacy which is achieved through 'critical framing' (see A. Luke 1994; C. Luke, 1999a & 1999b).

Critical media literacy engages with understanding the codes and conventions of media representations, meaning making and participating in the text and critical reading practices (Luke, 2003a). It implies moving from a close textual analysis to a reflective practice by exploring, for instance, program selections and preferences, critically reflecting on the incorporation of media into people's daily lives, and understanding how media messages shape identity and worldviews (C. Luke, 1999a, p. 623).

Critical media literacy is particularly significant in understanding how media texts variously empower and disempower groups through gendered representations. The importance of critical comprehension of gendered

representation in media is illustrated by studies as varied as health (Bergsma & Carney, 2008; see also Peterson, Wingood, Diclemente, Harrington, Davies, 2007), nutrition and body image (Harrison, 2003), physical education (McCullick, Belcher, Hardin & Hardin, 2003), and sports and body image (Koivula, 1999). Furthermore, with the consumption of various media by youth today through interactions with new media forms such as *Facebook*, *My Space*, *You Tube*, *Blogs* and *Wikis*, media exposure can be endless, thus making it necessary to focus on media literacy across the curriculum. There is a significant shift in youth engagement when media forms such as Google, Email and Blogs change to processes as in googling, emailing and blogging. Such a shift indicates a deeper and closer involvement of youth in new media forms, an immediacy of effect that can be highly influential in the case of race, class and gender, therefore emphasizing the importance of critical media literacy (see C. Luke, 1997b; 2002, 2007).

Applied to school based media literacy curricula, critical media literacy is not only for "uncovering false consciousness notion of ideology" (Luke, 1997a, p. 41), nor solely for the 'demystification' of the reality media texts purport to portray (Buckingham, 1998, p. 8). Instead of focusing exclusively on text analysis and critique, students are encouraged to reflect on the types of pleasures derived from media by providing them with tools to understand diverse reader/viewer interpretations and perspectives, and to comprehend diverse reader affinities and preferences (Luke, 2002, p. 133).

Media literacy is significant for analysis and critique of representations of race, class and gender ideologies and commodification (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; C. Luke, 1994a, 1997a, 1997b; Potter, 2001; Sholle & Denski, 1994; Tyner, 1998). Mass media have long been considered a powerful agent of gender socialization for young people, primarily through representations of stereotypes in children's programs, cartoons, soaps or sitcoms, advertising, films, popular music, and more recently through the World Wide Web and new software technology such as console and internet games, web advertising and so forth.

Media studies on gender stereotypes have been conducted since the 1960s when second wave feminism deconstructed gender formations in media texts. Feminists critiqued the biased and inequitable media representations to provide empowerment to women. Tuchman's (1978a) term 'symbolic annihilation' demonstrated the symbolic erasure of women's role in representations that depicted them in limited 'traditional' roles. Similarly, there was a strong move toward challenging overtly masculine representations of men. Although much was achieved by the research of that era, normative representations remain prevalent and, thereby, demand continuing, close scrutiny. Critique of media representations of masculinity was generally conducted in relation to studies on women and emphasized differences rather than similarities between the sex roles (Fejes, 1992, p. 10). As Fejes notes,

little has been done to explore issues of media representations of masculinity and more robust studies are required on the impact media images have on constructions of masculinity among boys and men. Saco's (1992) study of masculinity as signs demonstrates that feminist and mens' studies share the concern that some gender narratives gain greater social credibility than others.

Media literacy focused on gender explores issues of identity and sexuality through analysis of representations of women and men, girls and boys. Cultural labels or connotations of male/female, constructions of masculinity/femininity and their application to social roles, and reinforcement of stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity, are key areas of critical media studies.

The study of gender in media texts examines different characteristics and symbolism used to portray male/female subjects in magazines, newspapers, films, advertisements, television and digital technologies. Some important questions for analysis proposed by Buckingham (1993b, 2003), Kellner (1995) C. Luke (1994a), and Alvermann et al., (1999) are: How are male and female role models presented in media representations? How varied and diverse, and how representative of society are these portrayals? Is there sufficient variation in representations, or are these variations mere extensions of the same stereotype? What constructs of masculinity and femininity are included and excluded in a given text? How do dominant discourses function through

content selections and production features to marginalize some constructs of gender and valorize others? How have constructs of gender changed historically? Having signposted these questions, in the next section we examine representations of western gendered stereotypes in advertisements, magazines, films and popular music.

Gender in advertisements and print media

In advertisements and magazines, stereotypes of the female corporate entrepreneur, professional perfectionist, the supermoms, 'the blonde' as symbolic of white western beauty, or women as sex symbols and *femmes fatale* are common. In TV and magazine advertisements such constructs aim to sell products through sexualized images of women, capitalizing on and exploiting 'desirable' body image, or selling femininity through images of demure submissiveness. Men, on the other hand, as Bordo (2003) illustrates, are portrayed as muscular, tough, strong and sexually desirable. With some exceptions, men tend to be portrayed as socially and physically powerful and heterosexual and, women also heterosexual, but in a male confirming role as attractive accoutrement, more vulnerable and less powerful than men (see Wood, 1997).

In the 1970s and 1980s, a range of studies on gender stereotyping in advertising were undertaken (Goffman, 1979; Marshment, 1988; Millum, 1975; Tuchman, 1978a; Winship, 1987). These feminist scholars analyzed

advertisements and identified how women were unrealistically represented as docile, domesticated and secondary to men. Friedan's (1974) significant study on women's magazines from 1956 popularized the phrase the *feminine mystique* (mainly in relation to white middle class women; see hooks, 1984), to explain that women's principal aim was to achieve social recognition—and the ultimate degree of femininity—as wife and mother, preferably alongside a successful male. In the 1970s, Mulvey (1975) theorized the concept of the male gaze in relation to cinematic gender representations, and argued that the "determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly" (Mulvey, 2001, p. 397). This reaffirmed the notion of women's objectification as sex objects in the media, to be gazed upon, commodified, and invited to scrutinize themselves through the eyes of the 'male gaze'. Further, notable review in the 1980s by Whipple and Courtney (1985) revealed minimal change in the portrayal of women although they found more numerical depictions of female professionals.

A significant media response to the 1970s Women's Movement was the construction of the 'New Woman' concept. The concept of the 'New Woman', one who saw herself as professional or affluent, self-sufficient, capable and strong, was often interpreted as illustrative of the success of women's liberation (see van Zoonen, 1994, p. 72; Gough- Yates, 2002, p. 117). However, the 'new woman' concept, as critics (Barthel,1992; Davis, 1992; van Zoonen, 1994; and Gough-Yates, 2002) illustrate, never provided any

variations to the gender stereotype and was no more than a subtle extension of existing norms (see also Macdonald, 1995, p.197-200). The construct of the New Woman, then, was firmly positioned in the traditional gendered stereotype of the desirable woman and is "the co-optation of feminist ideals into acceptable fantasies of individual middle class achievement and success" (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 72). More recently, attempts to depict the New Woman provide representations of women as tough, irrepressible, career oriented and highly achievement motivated. Nevertheless, as Inness (1999) notes, although the image may have morphed, the underlying ideology remains traditional which tends to punish women for stepping out of line.

Thus:

> Cultural industries in particular have a long history of male cultural productions of feminine stereotypes and misrepresentations that conceptualize women primarily either as object of male adornment, pursuit, and domination, or as mindless domestic drudges, mentally vacant bimbos, or saintly supermoms. (Luke, 1997a, p. 21)

'New sexualities' (McRobbie, 1999) resulted in the sporadic incorporation of feminist ideas of the 'new woman' in magazines, and paradoxically allowed readers to participate in "stereotypical rituals of femininity without finding themselves trapped into traditional gender-subordinate positions" (p. 53; see also O' Shaughnessy, 1999, pp. 192-198). Studies by Gigi-Durham (1999), Gough-Yates (2003), Kilbourne (1999), Luke (1997a, 2003b) and Luke and Luke (1997), have illustrated how stereotypical images of femininity have survived over the past few decades. Thus, women

are still too often represented as hovering around ovens and toilets and "agonis[ing] over product choice" (Luke, 2003b, p. 199).

In advertisements and print media during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s men were represented as stoic, fulfilling traditional expectations of the 'man's man'. They were often depicted as virile and strong, accepting risk and gaining mastery, and appropriately portrayed outdoors or in business settings, or advertising alcohol or vehicles (Fejes, 1992, p. 13), or as a ladies' man, handsome and adept at the role of seduction (Barthel, 1992; Strate, 1992).

In 1980s', the 'new masculinity' concept depicted men in advertisements and in print magazines as the sensitive male who stressed the importance of a close bond especially with the father, or spent quality family time (Barthel, 1992, p. 146) as nurturing, "wheeling baby buggies" (Macdonald, 1995, p. 97; see also Mort, 1996). As Barthel (1992), Connell (1995), Fejes (1992) and Mort (1988, 1996) note, the consumer focus in the 1990s shifted to the carefree, self- absorbed and style conscious individual (see also Crewe, 2003; Nixon, 1996). Masculinity was represented principally as heterosexual and the image of the sensitive new-age guy (O' Shaughnessy, 1999, p. 219) became popular with well-dressed white men aspiring to current lifestyles and commodities. Men, as Kaufman (1999) argues, are rarely seen in commercials taking care of a child, and in representations of family they are often depicted

in knowledge activities – whether as active agents or as voice-overs -- which are stereotypically male.

The depiction of virile, muscular, white heterosexual males is clearly reductionist, simplistic and objectifies men (see Bordo, 2003). Men of color remained absent from media screens with the exception of African-American sports heroes or musicians— itself a reductionist and stereotyped image of African-American males. While the current meterosexual image may have changed from the 1980s persona, media gender relations have retained the male as superior to women who remain as objects of the patriarchal gaze.

Kellner (1995), in an insightful study of Marlboro cigarette advertising, traces the history of masculine and feminine media images and illustrates how products were targeted at men through representations of the 'real man' and the image of the cowboy with its associated connotations of 'frontier' masculinity. Women, however, are represented as transforming from the charming wife in earlier ads to the 'modern' more 'masculine' woman, to images representing anti-patriarchal female power (p. 252) in the 1980s. Thus, as Kellner (1995) observes, advertising is "as concerned with selling lifestyles and socially desirable identities, which are associated with their products, as with selling the product themselves" (p. 252).

Browne (1998), and Peirce and McBride (1999), illustrate that gender issues in advertising also filter through to advertisements for children. As studies (Luke, 1994b, 2003; Messner, 2000; Rogers, 1999) have shown, gendered norms exist in the marketing of Barbie and infant products which exemplifies an aspirational model towards which mothers and young girls construct their identities. According to Rogers (1999, p. 14; original emphasis), Barbie represents an "*emphatic femininity*" whereby she models a "proper feminine creature even when she crosses boundaries usually dividing women from men" (p. 17).

Browne's research (1998) demonstrates that boys are depicted as more knowledgeable, active and aggressive, and male voiceovers dominate American commercials (p. 86), while Childs & Maher (2003) argue, that more boys than girls are represented in advertisements, and that girls are generally absent in products targeted at boys. Similarly, Furnham, Abramsky and Gunter (1997) found U.S commercials more gender stereotyped in comparison with U.K commercials. Relatedly, Childs and Maher's (2003) research on food advertising demonstrates that there is an over representation of boys in food advertisements, which might send a subtle message of boys needing more sustenance than girls to build strong bodies while girls are discouraged from excessive food consumption.

Popular magazines, likewise, are common sites where femininities and masculinities are constructed. McRobbie (1991) illustrates how magazines such as *Jackie* were sites for women to practice and enact their sexuality, and valorized what by others was seen as a 'neurotic femininity'. McRobbie argues that the progressiveness in attempts to express women's issues in such magazines was contained within conventional frameworks of femininity.

More recently, however, McRobbie (1994, 1999) contends that magazines such as *Just Seventeen, Marie Claire* and *Elle* that represent a much wider range of women's issues, and their portrayal has shifted to an autonomous and self-confident feminine subjectivity. Jackson and Scott (1997, p. 567) agree that there is greater emphasis on "active female sexuality", but argue that the effects of such representations are simplified through reductionist feminine discourses that underpin them. Likewise, Burton (2005, p. 140) asserts that although women's magazines reflect the changing roles of women, the primary role remains traditionally 'feminine' and the female gaze represented in magazines is to attract male attention. In a comparative study of *Seventeen* and zines, Wray and Steele (2002, p. 200) illustrate how *Seventeen* fails to depict a "progressive (read 'feminist') view of sex and relationships" and it ends up providing a consumerist, beauty centric and heterosexual focus, while zines "allow for more diversity in representing what it means to be a woman" (p. 206).

Similarly, the ‘new man’ and, more recently, ‘new lad’ concepts as representative of contemporary masculinities are popular in men’s magazines (see Mort, 1996; see also Gill, 2003). Crewe’s (2003, p. 34) analysis of men’s magazines illustrates the ‘new man’ depiction as in-between the implicit masculine characteristics and traditional male perspective. Crewe (2003) and Attwood (2005) illustrate how magazines such as *loaded*, *Esquire* and *Arena*, adjusted to the changing perceptions of the ‘new man’ by accommodating a commercialized representation of masculinity, yet have retained familiar aspects of masculinity. Stevenson, Jackson and Brooks (2003, p. 121) discuss how magazines such as *loaded*, *Esquire, GQ*, *Arena* shifted from ‘softer’ nurturing versions of masculinity to a ‘harder’ version of masculinity in the ‘new lad’ image. The ‘new lad’ image caters to masculine behavior such as “drinking to excess, adopting a predatory attitude towards women and obsessive forces of independence” (p.121). They argue that these magazines are challenged by the knowledge that "old- style patriarchal relations are crumbling and [through] the desire to reinscribe power relations between different genders and sexualities” (p. 122). Gauntlett (2002, p. 180) while agreeing that there is a “strong macho agenda” suggests that the magazines portray “an enabling and constraining” discourse of masculinity. In brief, it may be argued that though there are subtle shifts in portrayal of gender, magazines largely provide stereotypical gender representations.

Television's gender package

Television has been immensely influential in creating and reaffirming gender roles and binaries, gender based values, patriarchy and the traditional roles of men and women (see Wood, 1997; see also C. Luke, 1994b). Male characters have been found to dominate prime time television, with women representing only 29% of appearances or screen time (Holtzman, 2000, p. 75; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1986; Gerbner, 1997). Although there was palpable role change in the 1970s, with more working women depicted in shows like *Charlie's Angels* (1976-1981) and *Police Woman* (1974-1978), Holtzman notes (2000, p. 78)[i] that prime time was dominated by men, and women remained in the ghetto of subordinate, supportive roles. Professional roles combined with the supermom image in shows such as *The Cosby Show* (1974-1978), *Family Ties* (1982-1989) and *Growing Pains* (1985-1992) aligned with the 'New Woman' image. By the 1990s, although there was greater variety of roles for women, they were still largely cast in domestic roles (Elasmar, Hasegawa & Brain, 1999). As Douglas (1994) notes, the contradictory messages represented by television programs do not allow women easy choice. Women in dominant roles were often depicted negatively or in normative housewifely roles such as in *Father Knows Best* (1954-1963), *Dad* (1997-2000), and more recently in *My Wife and Kids* (2001-2005). Further, role change had little impact on the overall stereotypical narratives in shows such as *Roseanne* (1998- 1997), *Murphy Brown*(1988-1998), and *Grace Under Fire* (1993-1998), or the career women represented in 1980s prime-

time soaps such as *Dallas* (1978-1991), *Dynasty* (1981-1989) or the more current *Commander-in-Chief* (2005-2006), or *West Wing* (1999-2006).

Studies by Signorielli (1993), Signorielli and Kahlenberg (2001), and Vande Berg and Streckfuss (1992) demonstrate that women in prime time television are often portrayed in lower status jobs while men are depicted in high profile professional jobs. Signorielli and Kahlenberg's (2001) study of prime time television from 1990 to 1998 affirms that there were more men than women depicted as employed, and more women represented in menial clerical jobs, and caring professions such as doctors, teachers, and lawyers. Although changing social and cultural practices introduced greater equality in numerical and gender role representations, Greenberg and Collette's (1997) study found an unequal ratio, with more men portrayed as managers and more women as housewives. Thus, while representations of gender have improved, stereotypes are still prevalent, with women often as bossy and domineering housewives like Debra in *Everybody Loves Raymond* (1996-2005), or Carrie in *King of Queens* (1998-2007) or more female nurses as in *Grey's Anatomy* (2005- current), a series that also depicts racialized heteronormativity . Women either have no occupation or are homemakers; few women are in leadership roles or, where they are (as in *House, 2004*-present), it is the male doctor who is more visible and influential.

The television market has become increasingly fragmented, thus recent series such as *Sex and the City* as noted by Arthurs (2007, p. 328) and Gerhard (2005), depict new forms of femininities. As Arthurs notes (2007, p. 328) there is a critical feminist discourse and representation of difference in such series, a "new gender regime" (McRobbie, 2004, p. 262), where women have greater freedom and choice. However, as Markle (2008, p. 45) comments, for all the sexual freedom advocated in the series the characters were depicted in relationships with "happily-ever- after" endings.

Similarly, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002), *Family Law* (1999-2002), *Judging Amy* (1999-2005) and *Desperate Housewives* (2004-current) represent new women who are openly feminist but nonetheless still sexy and seductive. According to Richardson (2006), *Desperate Housewives* illustrates the oppressions middle class women undergo behind closed doors. However, Richardson argues that despite the advances, the depictions of women are about individual empowerment and isolated triumphs rather than a move toward collective shifts in femininity. *Desperate Housewives* may depict 'camp' (Banet- Weiser, 2007) nevertheless, we believe that there is a subtle underpinning of the 'mad woman in the attic' symbolism, with the characters on *Wisteria Lane* representing women as 'nutty' and as shrews -- independent but still stereotyping western women's lives that centrally revolve around their sexual and social relationships with men.

More recently, in *Ugly Betty* (2006-current), although attempts are made to highlight differences from stereotypes, the heteronormative patterns are still maintained. Female ugliness is offset against beauty that is feminine and heterosexual; men are shown as successful and powerful in comparison to the powerless and effeminate such as Marc or Cliff the photographer. Betty saves each situation through her intelligence and skill, and Marc proves to be indispensable as a buffer for Wilhelmina, but it is at the expense of seeming foolish to the public and subtle messages are created to ensure that this is tolerated only because it is one character amongst many who are beautiful, feminine and heterosexual.

As Fejes (1992) and Saco (1992) argue, studies on masculinities in prime time television are few because of a greater focus on representations of femininities. Spangler's (1992) study of male friendships underpins television's role in defining men's and women's roles. Edwards (2004; see also Brown, 2005), studying *Reality Shows* discusses how programs such as *Survivor* (2000-current), *The Amazing Race*(2001-current), and MTV's *Real World*/ *Road Rules Challenge*(1992-current) are targeted towards reinforcing traditional gender norms (p. 227). Likewise, Butsch (2003) analyzing men in television notes that while middle class men are portrayed in a variety of roles and situations, working class men are portrayed as "immature", in fact "de-masculinized" in contrast to the women and children in these shows (p. 26). Similarly, Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles (2007, p. 302) observe, *West Wing*

attempts to disrupt stereotypes by projecting women as strong and confident, yet "finds solace in more nostalgic images of heroism personified by the white, male, presidential hero" (p.302).

These trends are also reflected in current cartoons and television shows aimed at children. In cartoons, while *Mission Kimpossible* (2002-2007) shows girls as the action hero and Avatar (2005-current) attempts to challenge gender stereotyping, in *Avatar*, for example, boys are depicted as taking more risks and girls are subtly presented in a motherly role. Likewise, most children's television programs, as noted by Witt (2000), retain gender stereotyping with insufficient representations of girls versus boys. Sesame Street's latest addition, Zoe, has been greeted with much media fanfare to celebrate the gender balance redress after some 40 years of Bert and Ernie, Big Bird, Elmo, Cookie Monster and The Count running the Street's cooperative social agenda. Ogletree, Martinez, Turner and Mason (2004) illustrate that gender preferences are still present with children choosing male *Pokémon* characters, while Thompson and Zerbinos (1997) examine how cartoon characters are stereotypic with boys as violent and girls as domestic. The Pay TV channel *Nickelodeon* (1991-1993) challenged gender stereotyping and illustrated the empowerment of girls. As Banet-Weiser (2007, p. 334) states, *Nickelodeon* became a champion for girls and illustrated that girl power was about recognizing women as contributing members of society. However, these were exceptions to the norm and the stereotypic images on television continue

through shows such as *Malcolm in the Middle* (2000-2006) and *Lizzie McGuire Show* (2001-2004). More recently, as Stevens-Aubrey and Harrison's(2004) study illustrates, while there is greater gender neutrality in children's shows, male characters are still depicted as dominant and bossy.

Films—masculinity and femininity

Popular western films have clearly defined gender roles depicting normative femininities with women as homemakers and as lovers. A raft of film studies has been conducted into gender stereotypes in popular films (see Abbott, 2002; Bell, Haas & Sells, 1995; Chibnall & Murphy, 1999; Nelmes, 2003; Stephens, 2002; Thornham, 1999). The following account is a brief sketch of gender stereotyping in movies and we acknowledge the brevity of this account. We only highlight the main trends in gender related stereotyping in, primarily, Hollywood films which are not representative of all popular western films, but which have been chosen due to the popularity of these films.

Themes of marriage, romance, dependence and heterosexual relationship have persevered in popular Hollywood films (See Holtzman, 2000). Films such as *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) *Roman Holiday*(1953), *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), *Father of the Bride* (1991) to *Meet the Parents* (2000), *Sweet Home Alabama* (2002), *Love Actually* (2003), *Meet the Fockers* (2004), *Good Luck Chuck* (2007) depicted these themes while, as Kellner

(1995, p. 115) notes, films such as *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (1992) have themes of monogamous marriage and an emphasis on traditional family and traditional roles for women. Women who are in more rebellious roles—as in *Fatal Attraction* (1987) or in *Boys don't Cry* (1999)—are 'treated appropriately and disciplined'. Thus, largely, Hollywood films retain patriarchal ideals and stereotypic femininities. Women were portrayed as icons of beauty and/or seduction which add glamour (and box office draw) to such films instead of projecting women's cognitive talents. As S. Smith (1999) rightfully comments, "films use all their powers of persuasion to reinforce—not the status quo, but some mythical Golden Age when men were men and women were girls" (p. 17).

James Bond became a popular spy in the 1960's as much through his detective abilities as through his womanizing magnetism (Holtzman, 2000). However, it must be acknowledged, as Bold (2003, p. 171) does, that women in the Bond films are an integral aspect of the "spy's fictional universe". Bold (2003) and Ladenson (2003) while accepting that Bond films rest on gendered representations, argue that there are moments of agency and subversion of male superiority. On the other hand, Miller (2003, p. 233) in a nuanced analysis comments, "Bond's gender politics are far from a functionalist world of total domination by straight, orthodox, masculinity", thus reaffirming the significance of analyzing Bond in the complexities of a highly technological and capitalist society. As Leach argues, "the formulaic style" is still intact in

Bond movies, with "violence and sexuality… both projected on to technology" (2003, p. 254).

Popular action films of the 1980s such as *Return of the Jedi* (1983), *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984), *Rush Hour* (1998), or more recently *Hollywood Homicide* (2003) continued the legacy of males in dominant roles.

Throughout the 1990s, although women were shown in a greater variety of roles, males dominated, important events happened around men, and films that made top box office profits portrayed men as heroes (Holtzman, 2000, p. 87). More recent films have consolidated masculinity by portraying either the new age man for whom the family is important, as in *Kindergarten Cop* (1990), *City Slickers* (1991), even *Terminator 2* (1991) (see Jeffords, 1995), or by portraying male homosexuality as negative and heterosexuality as positive – *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) being a notable exception despite the ire of the American conservative right. As Keller (1997, p. 150) observes, films such as *Rob Roy* (1995) and *Braveheart* (1995) represent these heroes as "the ideal of raw manhood" opposed to, and derisive of, gay characters. A nurturing, more feminized masculinity in films such as the children's blockbuster *Daddy Day Care* (2003) is also depicted in *The Full Monty* (1997) and *The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert* (1994) where, as Tincknell and Chambers (2002) observe, there are efforts to regain and reinvent patriarchal authority through feminine masculinity. Hence, as Stukator (1997) argues, "masculinity in jeopardy and male redemption

trajectories mark every period of American cinema, continually revised and renewed within the parameters of shifting generic paradigms" (p. 214).

Donald's (1992, p. 126) study of Hollywood's war films illustrates that whenever possible, "combat is reserved exclusively for males" or masculinity is reinforced through initiation rites, the men's club, or the stoic soldier. Mitchell (1996) analyzed Westerns and found that films from *Stagecoach* (1939) to *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) establish manhood through the politics and dynamics of gender relations or through issues of honor.

Constructs of masculinity are also evident in children's animated Disney films. Jeffords (1995) shows how *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) created a sensitive "new man" (p. 170) whose masculinity is reworked through a muscular body but a "loving interior" (p. 171). In like manner, McCallum (2002) argues that in most recent Disney films such as *Hercules* (1997), *Mulan* (1998), and *Tarzan* (1999), masculinity is explored "as a social construction—a bundle of behaviors, a way of being in the world, which must be learned" (p. 116). British crime films represent the tough guy (Spicer, 1999) while, as Lucas (1998) notes, in Australian films certain forms of masculinity are reproduced through representations of the self-reliant outback 'bushman' or the male bonds of 'mateship' in films like *Crocodile Dundee* (1986), and depictions of conventional masculinity in *The Man from Snowy River* (1982) (see also Biber, 1999).

Depictions of black bodies often occurs with negative connotations with representations of African American men as criminal or as angry young men (Jackson, 2006), and African American women being depicted as jezebels (Meyers, 2004) or as mammies, and welfare queens (Monahan, Shtrulis & Brown-Givens, 2005). As insightfully argued by hooks, another stereotype (1996, p. 80) is the African American woman as the mother often portrayed as "concerned with keeping the family together" in films and documentaries like *Hoop Dreams* (1994).

(Mis)representations of queer

Realistic representations of gays and lesbians in the media are woefully inadequate, with exposés driven by the need to capture as wide an audience as possible rather than for social or gender equity. In popular shows such as *Will and Grace* (1998-2006) or *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003- current), or *Queer as Folk* (2000-2005) or more recently, *How to Look Good Naked* (2006- current) and films such as *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997), *The Next Best Thing* (2000), and *The Object of My Affection* (1998), gays are mostly represented in nurturing or humorous roles, taking care of, and supportive of straight men and women (see Shugart, 2003; Battles & Hilton-Morrow, 2002). As observed by Shugart (2003), homosexuality is normalized and gay "sexuality is distilled as the strategy via which heterosexual male privilege is enacted and heteronormativity is renormalized" (p. 88). Similarly, Wlodarz (2001) argues that films like *Sleepers* (1996), *American History X* (1998) that

represent male rape, “give license to the demoralization, prosecution, brutalization, and even murder of ‘fags’” (p. 73) and firmly reassert ways of reinstating straight male subjectivity.

Since the 1990s, while there has been greater depiction of gays and lesbians, these characterizations have moved away from derisive representations, and portrayals focus more on gay professionals rather than representing personal relationships amongst gays (see Aaron, 2004; Jennings & Lominé, 2004). As noted by Jennings and Lominé (2004, p. 147) films like *The Sum of Us* (1994), although promoting tolerance of gay people, reinvent dominant values with the gay son in a nurturing role taking care of his sick father. More recently, *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) tackles white, gay sexuality but has been variously criticized for aiming to “polarize, dichotomize, and oversimplify issues of sexuality and sexual orientation” (Brod, 2006, p. 252). Further, as Pitt (2006) also illustrates, media clearly have preferences about bisexuals by pathologizing black bisexuality while ignoring or sympathizing with white bisexuals.

Although there has been some progress in representing gay and lesbian groups in films, in advertising the depictions are vague and ambivalent. As Ragusa (2005) argues, greater visibility in media does not afford social legitimation to gays and lesbians. Rather, it seems such representations have “commodified homosexuality” and, while representational focus might have

shifted, gays are still portrayed as "unconventional and deviant" (p. 672). Thus, as Kates (1999, p. 32) observes, depicting gay men in advertisements such as those for *Ikea* showing two men shopping for a dining table, *Miller Lite Beer* depicting a group of gay men enjoying beer, and *Toyota Seca* representing two men leaving for a holiday, are little more than attempts to gain gay customers (the 'pink' dollar). Hence, we would argue the need for critical thinking on advertisements that focus on gays and lesbians to provide them with a "collective voice" (Ragusa, 2005, p. 673), yet are sites for the "perpetuation of patriarchal values" (Kates, 1999, p. 33).

Arguably, queer representations in the media are less about the politics of equity and more about capital, profit and market share. As Robertson (1996) reiterates, queerness in media representations is a mix of ambiguous messages, not a move to create a niche for difference; instead it is a reframing of heteronormativity and traditional masculinity and femininity.

MTV and visual stereotypes

Popular music might be considered as an "assemblage of several…simultaneous streams, that cross, interweave, and diverge at different historical moments" (Brackett, 2005, p. xvi). Yet, gender binaries and stereotypes are evident in the various "assemblages", particularly since the advent of rock and roll (Holtzman, 2000; see also Cameron, 2003; P. Smith, 1999). As Whiteley (2000) notes, rock gave women a space within which to

express their rebelliousness and independence, but it did little to challenge stereotypes because women were often considered ‘intruders’ in the male world of rock (p. 14). Although gender stereotypes have been challenged to a certain degree by Madonna, Annie Lennox and the Spice Girls (Lemish, 2003), MTV reiterated women’s sexualized image, thereby containing feminist representations enacted by these artists. Writing about the Spice Girls, Lemish (2003) observes noticeable changes in the manner in which female pop groups represent themselves. Tapper and Black’s (1995) study of female pop vocalists notes that women such as Tina Turner, Cindi Lauper and Madonna offered videos that were of a different genre that sought to represent a radical sexual perspective and to demonstrate a rebellious ‘talking back’.

Kellner’s (1995, p. 268) extended study of Madonna’s career, interprets her constant image and identity metamorphosis as promoting experimentation and creating a unique fashion and style. Kellner (1995) notes that early in her career Madonna’s construction of herself as sex object and transgressor were successful strategies to sell her image (see also, Hawkins, 2004). While Paglia (2005) observes that “Madonna’s role model to millions of girls worldwide has cured the ills of feminism by reasserting women’s command of the sexual realm” (p. 348), and Gauntlett (2004) contends that Madonna was the first to “remix her own populist version of feminism” (p. 168), Kellner (1995) argues that although Madonna succeeded in reversing power and creating a new form of feminist rebellion, she merely “transposes relations of domination,

reversing the roles of men and women, rather than dissolving relations of domination" (p. 287).

Music videos in the 1980s represented the American cultural experience through MTV, a cable television network devoted to music for young adults. Depictions of gender, in particular on MTV, became firmly ingrained in adolescent consciousness (Holtzman, 2000, p. 93). Sommers–Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan and Davis (1993), in their study of 40 MTV music videos, found that gender stereotypes remained generally intact. They noted that men portrayed more aggressive behaviors and women were objectified sexually. A comparable study by Seidman (1999) of 91 MTV videos, also illustrated that male and female musicians and vocalists were represented in stereotypic roles.

More recent studies suggest that male leads are represented as aggressive and dominant and in sexual overtures with women (Arnett, 2002; Andsager & Roe, 1999; Gow, 1995, Orange, 1996; Ward, 2002; Ward, Hansbrough & Walker, 2005). Further, these studies illustrate how 'musician' or 'rock star' masculinity emphasizes raw male power and physicality, compared to women's sexual and decorative appeal. As Arnett (2002) comments, the overt sexualization of men and women is achieved through men performing and women enacting sexual mores; thus "women are mostly just props; not characters, not even people, really" (p. 256). While angry images of male artists are common and go unremarked, women artists who present an angry

image are “pathologised” and perceived as lacking control (Davies, 2001, p. 307; see also Reynolds & Press, 1995). Finally, Ward (2002) found that constant exposure to music videos led to gender stereotyping amongst youth and greater acceptance of traditional views about gender. Ward (2002) cautions that such exposure can influence women to see themselves as sexual objects, and to be more accepting of traditional gender roles.

Gender schism is also evident in music magazines where women artists are either ignored or referred to in reductive terms as ‘girls’ (Davies, 2001, p. 303). Similarly, Young (2004), writing about Australian popular music, notes that male pop stars used to be viewed with suspicion and, although there has been considerable progress, the myth of music and dance as a site of homosexuality still informs Australian music. Hence, male artists demonstrate a need to present an angry and aggressive image in music videos to distance themselves from that gay mythology. Popular music performances have been within a “narrow, almost asexual, ideal of the performing male” (p. 189). In summary, although the music industry and music videos have traversed great changes from romance to rebellion, gendered norms remain across persistent image reinventions. While the Spice Girls, Madonna, and Annie Lennox display postmodern feminism (Rodger, 2004; Lemish, 2003; Pisters, 2004; Whiteley, 2000) and create new meanings of feminism and femininity, gender stereotyping seems entrenched within the music industry and in its messages to youth.

In brief, as a major site for gender ideology production, media offer "symbolic resources" (Buckingham, 2003, p. 5) through representations that shape world views (see also C. Luke & H. Luke, 1997). Media institutions are 'big business' that produce and disseminate cultural products and cultural narratives increasingly to global audiences. Louw (2001), Taylor and Willis (1999), Hardt (2000), Strinati (2000), Kellner (1995), Garnham (1990, 2000), and Herman and McChesney (1997, see also McChesney, 1999), argue that private ownership controls media content. The demise of free to air network TV, and the shift to multinational media empires means that 'media moguls' (Tunstall & Palmer, 1991) have considerable influence in the production of mass media artifacts (Taylor & Willis, 1999) with only a few people having control over production, distribution, and access to audiences. In turn, production practices for economic profit often foreground preferences for certain discourses over others. Therefore, stereotypical representations of gender as commercial production illustrate how power operates in the media to disseminate hegemonic discourses (see Strinati, 2000, p. 255). As Louw (2001) comments, as 'king-makers' and as "legitimators/de-legitimators from the second half of the century, media institutions have become prized possessions for those seeking power" (p. 9). Thus, certain types of texts and ideologies are historically reified, reconstructed and reaffirmed (Louw, 2001, p. 6; see also Golding & Murdock, 2000; Garnham, 1990, 2000; Kellner, 1995; Schudson, 1996). Tuchman (1978b, pp. 82-83) argues that media mixes

fact and fiction, since “facticity” provides some “verification” to stories. In light of this perspective, gender representations arguably have not changed much although they have transformed with the times and present constructs of femininities and masculinities that are a clever intermix of the old and the new.

Media messages, as Carter and Steiner (2004) reflect, “never simply mirror or reflect ‘reality’, but instead construct hegemonic definitions of what should be accepted as ‘reality’” (p. 21). Thus, the ideological preferences that reside in media texts may provide preferred readings and meaning making (Carter & Steiner, 2004). Since the Birmingham School’s emphasis on audience reception, more recent studies have focused on active audience participation and resistant reading (Fiske, 1989; Morley, 1986; McRobbie, 2000). Early audience studies by Hobson (1980), and later by Morley (1986), researched women’s media preferences. McRobbie’s (1991) critical analysis of *Jackie*—a popular British magazine in the 1970s for girls—described readers as being positioned in traditional feminine ways. Ang’s (1985) insightful study of audience preference for watching *Dallas* illustrated feminist pleasures and women’s preferences. Audience research highlights the importance of the situatedness of media in social and cultural practices and asserts that audience preferences are also intermeshed with social, political and cultural powers (Ang, 2001; Carter & Steiner, 2004; Luke, 2003a).

We have provided a broad brush sketch to map the terrain of gender representation in media, production practices, and audience response. Although not an exhaustive account, and mindful of the limitations of the media text examples we have provided, our aim has been to highlight issues around media literacy and gender in the media. We are cognizant that for every Mrs. June Cleaver there is a Lara Croft, for every Dolly Parton there is a Tracy Chapman, and for every saccharine Bangles girl group there are Dixie Chix – in short, there are always exceptions and counter examples to the media texts we have selected to map the normative discourse of gender in the media. We conclude by illustrating and emphasizing the importance of critical media literacy in analyzing gender representations.

Implications for media literacy and gender

Critical media literacy, as discussed in the introduction, extends the analytic skills of media literacy. In relation to gender, critical media literacy provokes critical questions. It queries particular representations of gender as well as the social accuracy and source of gender representation; it questions whose versions of stereotypes are represented and how these are marketed.

While media literacy focused on gender may explore the power of advertising and sitcoms that portray gender stereotypes, critical media literacy will go beyond interrogation of the semiotic or production features to examine how codes and conventions invoke particular cultural discourses, and

reference to and reproduce relations of power/knowledge. As MacKinnon (1992) notes, stereotypical representations of women construct knowledges that align with dominant discourses. As many feminist scholars of media and literacy (e.g., Alvermann, 1999; C. Luke, 1994a) have identified, gender identities are constructed and negotiated through preferred reading practices, yet gendered reading practices are largely ignored (Alvermann, 1999, p. 147). Analysis of gendered reading practices can illustrate how media contribute to shaping people's gender constructs, but it does not challenge the manufacture of gender stereotypes by the culture industries (Alvermann, 1999; Buckingham, 2003; Luke, 2003a; Semali, 1999). Arguably then, while reader response is relevant in providing critical interpretations of texts, it does little to unsettle stereotypical notions of gender (C. Luke, 1994a; Semali, 1999). An interpretative approach does little to change student perceptions and thus, critical reading requires a "self–reflexive critique" (C. Luke, 1994a, p. 43).

A gender related critical media analysis would include a critical understanding of the social and cultural constructions of women and men, girls and boys, and gender relations. Additionally, readers and viewers ought to engage with stereotypes recreated through dominant discourses, examine inclusions and exclusions in texts, analyze the use of metaphor and metonymy that reaffirm gender stereotypes, and investigate historical and contemporary gender ideologies and dominant discourses. Such a multi-leveled analytic and hermeneutic approach should ideally lead students to reflect critically on

issues of social justice and to develop their own standpoint on gender inequities, identities, and relations.

Critical media literacy also commonly involves semiotic analysis which examines “cultural coding” (Luke, 2003b, p. 199). Such cultural coding might include, for example, analysis of gendered color codes that are indicative of traditional values (e.g., pinks for girls/blues for boys), sexual allure or social class, or through accessories that are indicative of class or beauty (ibid). Critical semiotic analysis includes analysis of camera angles, pacing or lay-out that, for example, present close-ups of women’s body parts signifying sexual foregrounding (Luke, 2003b), slow pacing and close-ups for women’s soap operas, or fast pacing, jump cuts, and use of primary colors to signify masculinity . Recent studies (Thwaites, Davis & Mules, 1994, 2002; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) provide insightful analysis of male-female binaries in media representations. For example, examining camera angles, color combinations, lighting, the placement of the addressor/addressee — in short, studying generic sign systems is significant for developing critical media literacy (see also Chandler,1998).

The significance of critical media literacy is paramount especially in light of the centrality of media across the curriculum. Whether it is news articles on 'appropriate' citizenship or the impact of images of models on teen perception of the perfect body, or a critique of stereotyped sexuality to create a

socially just society, media education has a significant place in present day curriculum. Although Media Studies as a subject has been a school offering in England and Australia for a considerable time (see Kubey, 2003; Quinn, 2006), as critics (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 1994; Hobbs & Frost, 2003; Kubey, 2003; Luke, 1997a, 1999a) indicate, the intersection between language, literacy and cultural studies in media makes media literacy central across the curriculum. From a cultural perspective, media literacy enables students to adopt different standpoint with regards to race, class and gender, while from a social justice angle it allows them to understand how texts of everyday life are biased, particularly, in terms of gender. Students could study a wide range of stereotypical representations of women, for example in science, engineering and technology and its negative impact on girls' perception of science (Steinke, 2005) or examine the gendered nature of politics (see Kahn, 1994; Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005).

In sum, thinking critically about media and its relations to gender stereotyping in all areas of the curriculum is central to literacy. It illustrates power/knowledge relations that reside both in media narratives and in the reader-viewer, and it foregrounds issues of identity, audience pleasures and preferences, pragmatic use, reader positions and the politics of production. To conclude, this chapter has focused on the importance of critical reading of media texts, within larger social, cultural and political processes in which text-image and readers are embedded. In engaging with critical media literacy, we

assert the importance of avoiding the “tyranny of authoritarian transmission models”, and “slipping into a vacuous celebration of difference and rampant pluralism” (C. Luke, 1998, p. 35).

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[i] See Holtzman's (2000) insightful critique on gender representation in *Media messages*.