



GENDER AND AGE IN MEDIA EDUCATION

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Abstract: Nowadays mass media shape the perception of social values and roles. Thus, aspects of media education that deal with various kinds of inequalities influence general sensitivity to diversity and its consequences. In this respect media and intercultural competences interrelate. Not only minorities' rights have to be secured, but also majorities rights have to be considered if it happens that majorities are discriminated. Widely accepted gender and age inequalities presented on the media in stereotypes and safely-looking conservatist behaviours may lead to harassment and even violence. That is why understanding media messages and identifying overt and covert forms of discrimination are of special interest of educators. In this article several activities for class teachers are presented to encourage them to introduce the touchy topic of gender and age inequalities into their school practice.

Key words: media education, intercultural education, gender studies, age discrimination

1. Introduction

The project "ICTime – ICT as a tool for intercultural and media education" allows for investigation the role of media in intercultural education and their impact on contemporary and future societies. As mass media are accessible by almost all people the cultural power of media messages is immense. Educators need to recognize both the values transmitted by the media and the persuasive impact of media messages on the society. Young generation needs to be taught how to identify media manipulation, how to prevent various kinds of inequalities which may lead to discrimination of various groups. This helps to develop critical thinking useful both for better understanding media messages and developing intercultural competences. Learners' greater sensitivity to perceive inequalities and discrimination may lead to surprising conclusions. It turns out that even majority groups may not exercise equal rights in voicing their concerns because of well-established stereotypes and some media practice taken for granted.

In this article gender and age inequalities in media content and access to new media will be discussed. As the level of gender and age inequalities may differ across cultures, practical tasks for teachers and educators will be presented in the form of questions to help focus attention on this issues. The main advantage of this approach is its potential for individual or group investigation, analysis and conclusions. The disadvantage is that in some cases even the attempt to look from a different angle on the inherited and fully accepted gender and age roles in the society, social perspectives and practice is perceived as an attack on traditional values. People may hardly accept any change in the essential grounds of their identity as women and men as they are used to the existing practice and in many cases most of them have learned how to benefit from the situation. That is why they may consciously or subconsciously refuse to notice forms of gender and age discrimination in the media messages, because any change and even thinking of change is painful. However there are circumstances which may facilitate the process of change (Gardner 2004).

2. Gender and age inequalities in media

Gender and age are important factors influencing individual identities and culture. Although equal rights for men and women are accepted as human rights in most cultures they are not exercised at the equal level. What is more, equal rights for all are explicitly written in the most European highest policy acts, such as constitutions, but they are not executed. On the one hand different needs, different priorities and experience of each gender have to be respected on the individual and organizational level. On the other hand human rights should be equally valid for a all members of the society. Unfortunately discrimination in various areas of social life is widely observed, but rarely discussed

and commented on the media. Nowadays women are entitled e.g. to vote, to study, to manage their own finances as a result of the emancipation movements in the XIX and XX century. However the women's rights are still disregarded. Stereotypes support inequalities in access to beneficial social positions such as political representation, participation in business and academic committee boards. Care professions essential for human well-being such as child-care and elderly-care, teaching, nursing are underpaid in most countries. The salary for equal work is much lower for a woman. Mundane housework in many cultures is assigned to a woman's activity and disdained by men who expect everyday service. Popular reaction to the claim of equal political rights, share of house and family work and responsibilities and social power are often laughed out by the privileged group, that is men. On the contrary the stereotypes about men's roles in the society in many cases discriminate men, too. This aspect of gender inequalities also needs to be introduced at the early stages of education to prepare the next generation for more coherent cooperation across genders, ages, ethnic groups etc.

3. Practical tasks for educators

The activities for teachers and educators are grouped into three categories of inequalities. As television is still the most powerful mass media the messages on TV screen are recommended for investigation. The first category covers gender issues on the media. The second category deals with age discrimination. The third category refers to unequal access to the new media by women and the elderly. A teacher or an educator may select the activities according to the needs of the students and local challenges.

1. Gender discrimination on the media

Introductory activity: Discuss the stereotypes of a woman and man in your society – if necessary take into consideration the stereotypes attributed to various ethnic groups.

If you find it useful, discuss some steps in women emancipation. Not long ago were women not entitled to vote, to enter universities, to have any financial resources at their disposal, to be legally responsible for children upbringing.

Activity 1. Gender related time sharing on the media

Let the students to brainstorm their awareness of women's discrimination on TV by asking them the following questions about sharing screen time:

How much time women in comparison to men are shown on the screen? Discuss various channels.

How much time is devoted to women's affairs at different time of the programme, e.g. at prime time and in the morning?

How much time female and male top sports champions are presented on screen?

Is a woman or man talking shown on the screen or their voice is only heard?

How much time men/woman's inequalities in politics, salaries, sexual harassment, home violence etc. are discussed?

Activity 2. Gender related media topics

Then ask the students the following questions about topics and values:

Which topics are discussed with women's/ men's participation?

Who (men or women) discusses women's issues such as pregnancy, fertility, new-born babies care?

Who (men or women) discusses men's issues such as e.g. men's diseases? Find other men's issues discussed on the media?

What values are assigned to women and male interests?

What social roles are women and men assigned to while being presented on TV?

Do the roles of genders presented on TV support or contradict the existing stereotypes?

Activity 3. Men and women in various media genres

Together with the students select some **advertisements** popular on the media. Discuss the following aspects:

What products are advertised by men and women?

Who is the target audience of gender-specific advertisements? Do the gender of advertisers agrees with the gender of the target audience? Why or why not? How does it influence the message?

What values and emotions are supposed to be desired by the target audience? What is expected to be obtained after using the product advertised? How the effect of using the product relates to gender?

What values and emotions are assigned to the product advertised for men and for women: e.g. effectiveness, strength, social acceptance, happiness, e.t.c. ?

Activity 4. Gender in soap operas

Together with the students select a **soap opera** popular on the media. Discuss the following aspects:

To what extent men/female roles presented in the soap opera support or contradict stereotypes about men's /women's social roles?

What activities do men/women perform in the soap opera? Do the activities reflect commonly accepted social practice?

Which social roles and activities are respected, which are taken for granted? How is it shown?

Activity 5. Gender in sports

Together with the students select a **sports programme** popular on the media. Discuss the following aspects:

Is a success of a sports man/woman or a sports team of any gender attributed to a bigger group such as a sports fans, inhabitants of a town, nation? Is it a success of a female(s) or male(s)?

Who is a supporter of the sports champion e.g. a father or partner/husband of a woman champion; a mother or wife of a man champion?

Are the sports champions assessed by their physical and sexual attractiveness?

Activity 6. Gender in politics/business

Together with the students select a **news programme** popular on the media. Discuss the following aspects:

Who (men or women) are the news presenters?

What topics do men or women talk about in the news?

What family models are presented in news? What roles, responsibilities and duties are prescribed for men and what for women?

What questions are asked to men and women who succeed in politics/business, e.t.c.? For example: How do you share your family duties with your political/professional activities? What does your spouse think about the latest promotion in your career?

What is the attitude presented on media to emancipatory movements of gender groups?

Where is the camera placed while presenting a man or woman? Which gender is presented from higher or lower position of the camera, that is from the top, from the bottom, or from the bust level?

Activity 7. Gender of symbols

Some neutral **symbols** tend to be perceived as one gender in culture and as such presented on media. Reflect on the following issues:

Many religions present God as a man even if theology shows non or multi gender qualities of God? Discuss the gender-related qualities of God in any religion you are familiar with. How would it change the perception of God in your mind in terms of values of emotions if it is presented as a female or neutral? In many religions men only are entitled to celebrate ceremonies. What, in your opinion, would it change if women can also celebrate?

In many places a country symbol is a female, e.g. Mother Polonia, Mother Latvia, Marianne as a symbol of France. In Portugal the Republic and towns such as Lizbon and Evora are symbolised by a female figure. What qualities of the national or town female symbol are transferred onto female citizens of the area, e.g. suffering, feeding, devotion? What responsibilities are transferred on male citizens of the area? How is it shown on the media?

Imagine a man being a symbol of your country. What would it change in terms of values, responsibilities and emotions towards the country?

Can you find other symbols that are neutral or multi gender by nature but gender is added in culture and media? Discuss them with your colleagues?

Activity 8 Topics neglected in the media

Together with the students brainstorm **topics and issues** which are **neglected** by the media. They may identify some of the topics from the list, but the list may differ in various cultures and social contexts.

Differences in the salaries for the same job done by men and women.

Equal rights of mothers and fathers to child care including maternity/fraternity leaves.

Equal rights of young mothers and fathers on the job market.

Unequal share of housework and child care even in the case of an unemployed father.

Reasons why the number of single-mother families exceeds the number of single-father families.

Employment rate of men and women.

Poverty that affects men, women and children to different extent.

Preventing family violence.

Legal regulations concerning the victims and culprits of family violence and execution of this legal policies.

Unequal representation of men and women in politics, industry, business committee boards, academic bodies.

Unequal representation of men and women as a voice of community e.g. trade unions.

Unequal educational principles for girls and boys such as content of the textbooks, rules of conduct.

Different moral standards for men and women.

Unequal participation of men and woman in the care of the elderly. As women's life span is longer than men's lack of care affects elderly women more than men.

Unequal access to gender specific health care. For example limited access to preventive female cancer diagnostics. Men's diseases are not discussed as they contradict the stereotype of a strong man.

Gender share of public financial means – the number of men and women who are estimated to use the result of investments from public funds, e.g. football stadium versus amusement part for kids and families.

Activity 9. Gender discrimination on the media

Give examples of gender discrimination on the media in your area. How can you raise awareness of gender discrimination on the media among the pupils?

2. Age discrimination on the media

The representation of the various age groups on the media is neither equal nor sufficient. The dominating group is the people between thirty and fifty years of age. The other age groups are discriminated. This may severely affect attitudes to the discriminated groups as well their own self-perception as members of a society. Below it is advised to concentrate on the content of the TV as it is still perceived as the most influential mass medium.

Activity 10. Age representation on screen – *the elderly*

Discuss the stereotypes of an elderly person in a society.

Together with the students discuss the following aspects:

How much time people at the age 50+, 60+, 70+ are presented on screen?

Who are they (men, women)?

What social roles are they assigned to the elderly?

What needs of the elderly are presented?

Are they able to voice their needs and opinions?

How old are advertisers of products for the elderly? What values are achieved after getting/using the product advertised? Are the values different or the same as for the middle-aged audience?

What image is build through their appearance on screen? Does it support the stereotypes or contradict them?

What may the elderly learn from their age group representation on the media?

Is it possible for them to learn how to overcome generation, technological e.t.c. gaps?

What education both non-formal and informal is offered to this age group in different media messages?

Activity 11. Age representation on screen – *the teenagers*

Discuss the stereotypes of the teenagers in a society. Together with the students discuss the following aspects:

How much time the teenagers are presented on screen? Are they able to voice their needs and opinions?

What needs of the teenagers are visualised in advertisements? What products are advertised to the young audience?

How are they presented: as members of subcultures, as active members of a democratic society?

Who expresses their needs and expectations to be provided opportunities for development?

Is it possible for them to learn from the media how to overcome generation gaps, to maintain dialog with their parents and grandparents – to develop social cohesion?

What may the teenagers learn from their age group representation on the media?

What education both non-formal and informal is offered on the media to this age group?

Activity 12. Age representation on screen – *the children*

Discuss the stereotypes of the children in your a society. Reflect on the following questions :

How children can be perceived and presented on the media in a society with a very low and very high birth rate?

What family type is presented as a model: two parents with two children (if more – how many) of different sex? Who is the oldest child in the model family a son or a daughter? How does it support or contradict gender stereotypes?

What needs of children are presented in media advertisements? What activities do they perform? Do they need more than being fed, having clothes washed and being driven in a parent's car?

How are the emotional and social need of the children satisfied e.g. via products or personal contact?

Activity 13. Media discourse about the children

Together with the students discuss the following aspects:

Is there enough information on the media how children are affected by the message they get from screen?

Are the responsibilities for children equally assigned to mothers and fathers in media presentations?

Is the discourse about children used to influence political decisions on access to job market, provision of support such as kindergartens.

Is the content of the media monitored and its suitability for children is clearly marked?

Is equal access to healthcare and education to all children in the society discussed?

Why do you think the remedial family production based on British Super Nanny – customised by many TV stations in many countries– has got international audience? What does it say about the society?

Activity 14. Relation between media and intercultural competences

Find out similarities and differences between media competences and intercultural competences. To what extent knowledge, skills, critical thinking strategies developed for intercultural dialogue are useful for understanding media messages? How can better understanding and critical thinking of the media content may influence the ability to interact in the intercultural dialogue?

How can we prevent media manipulation, on personal, professional, local, global levels?

How can we, as educators, teach the identification of gender and age discrimination on the media?

What values and attitudes, strategies of critical thinking have to be promoted and introduced in education about media?

3. Age and gender discrimination in access to the new media

According to the research presented in PISA 2003 results girls and boys do not have equal access to computers and the internet (*Are students ready...?*)¹. What is more they do use new technologies for different purposes and in a different way.

Find this document and study tables 2.2.b on page 93, and tables 3.2 on page 3.2 and 3.5 on page 106 and 3.6 on page 107.

According to Commission staff working document *The use of ICT to support innovation and lifelong learning for all – A report on progress* Brussels 09/102008 **SEC(2008) 2629 final**² genders and different age groups do not have equal access to the technology both the Internet and computers.

Discuss with the students data in Tables on pages 24-37 and 40-43 about gender and age discrimination with access to new media.

¹ Use the title to find this document on the OECD website

² Use the symbols in bold to find the document on the Commission website.

Activity 15. Gender and age discrimination in your own environment

Observe the gender and age discrimination in your own environment. Reflect on the following questions:

How much time do female and men spend in front of the computer? What activities do they perform?

Is the use of technologies comprised in the gender and age stereotypes? Give examples.

What can you do to overcome the stereotypes related to gender and age discrimination in the access to new technologies?

What are the responsibilities of teachers and educators to help the discriminated groups to enlarge their interest in new media?

What can you do to prevent the gender and age discrimination in access to new media?

4. Conclusion

Both intercultural and media competences prioritise observation strategies and critical thinking to prevent discrimination towards any individual or group in a society. Thus the role of educators is to sensitise young people to any forms of discrimination to people of different gender, age, ethnicity, with disabilities. This often requires rebuilding own system of perception of social and cultural values, which can be difficult and painful also for the teacher. The reflection and practical activities can help both teachers and students to develop their media and intercultural skills and increase intercultural dialog.

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