

Women and Media:

Study on the Marginalization of Female Discourse Power

FEMMES ET MEDIAS:

UNE ETUDE SUR LA MARGINALISATION DU POUVOIR DU DISCOURS FEMININ

LI Xiao-hui¹

LEI Min²

Abstract: The mass media is a window of reflecting the mass ideology. This article makes a thorough analysis on the marginalization of female discourse power and studies the potential sexual discrimination of this phenomenon, regarding females as the subjects and the objects of the mass media, and then further traces its deep reasons upon which some constructive suggestions and improved measures have been proposed. The article aims at awakening the masses to establish the correct sexual ideology in harmony and pursuing the equality of discourse power between females and males.

Key words: mass media; female discourse power; marginalization; sexual discrimination

Résumé: Les médias de masse est la fenêtre pour refléter l'idéologie de la masse. Cet article fait une analyse approfondie sur la marginalisation du pouvoir du discours féminin et étudie la discrimination sexuelle inhérente à ce phénomène tandis que les femmes sont les sujets et les objets des médias de masse. Il explore en outre la raison profonde de ce phénomène sur laquelle des suggestions constructives et des mesures améliorées ont été proposées. L'article vise à l'éveil des masses à fin d'établir une idéologie sexuelle correcte et harmonieuse et de poursuivre l'égalité du pouvoir de discours entre les femmes et les hommes.

Mots-Clés: médias de masse; pouvoir du discours féminin; marginalisation; discrimination sexuelle

¹ School of Foreign Languages, Wuhan University of Technology, Wuhan 430070, Hubei, China.

² School of Foreign Languages, Wuhan University of Technology, Wuhan 430070, Hubei, China.

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INTRODUCTION

“Discourse” is a kind of information resource, whose nature is free. “Discourse power” refers to the strong ideological function expressed by the discourse within real operation through the internal adjustment which entitled internal things certain order and meaning, namely “power”(ZHANG Yun-ting, 2005). Therefore, the discourse power comes into being when the free information resources are involved into a certain ideology.

According to the social gender theory, the social gender discrimination is divided into three categories: explicit discrimination, implicit discrimination and reverse discrimination. Of them, reverse discrimination refers to the phenomenon that confines the female within a specific field and scope by praising some special nature of them, for example, applauding the female “a considerate wife and a devoted mother”, thus results in the modeling of the female character trait. The praises for a housewife role involves a discrimination factor, which is in nature falling into a reverse discrimination in the way of conducting damn with faint praise. It is more concealed than implicit discrimination (ZHAO Zhi, 2009).

In China, the research on women and media originated from the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. Since then, with the increasing development of mass media, women, as the media subjects and objects, have been experiencing their developing in scope of discourse power from the absolute absence to apparent progressive growing up and at length to marginalization--drop into the male discourse hegemony trap. Throughout the history, few studies and researches on women and media have been conducted from the perspective of gender analysis on women’s status and development especially their plights. Furthermore, the topic of gender has been ignored in the theory of media. This article makes an overall study and analysis upon the development, existing problems of the female discourse power in mass media, and then traces back its deep reasons, finally puts forward some constructive suggestions.

1. THE MARGINALIZATION OF THE FEMALE DISCOURSE POWER AND SEXUAL DISCRIMINATION

1.1 The Sexual Discrimination and Marginalization of the Discourse Power against Women as the Media Subjects

In the contemporary information-globalized society, with the explosion of the mass media, the status of women as the subjects in mass media, has been improving increasingly. Under the surface of the more discourse power women have got during transmission, studies conceal the weakness and marginalization of discourse power for women, the media subjects, especially in decision-making or hard news. Actually, the truth of gender inequality has been hidden under the apparent prosperity.

1.1.1 The Weakness and Marginalization of the Discourse Power against Women as Media Subjects

Liu Ping’s research on CCTV channel 1-12 and its audiences (see Figure 1) confirmed John Harriet’ point of view: in the post-modernism news reporting, although “feminization” emerged, the truth of more hidden gender inequality have been involved which further confirmed that in today’s mass media, though the hostesses win in quantity, they can hardly achieve the authentic equality in quality on the whole level, that is to say, in the field of hard news of the medium of television emerges the marginalization and weakening of the female voice.

Figure 1 (LIU Ping, 2009)

Host Audience	Soft News		Hard News		Total Number
	Host	Hostess	Host	Hostess	
Female	34	68	59	25	93
Male	36	73	71	34	107
Percentage	35%	70.5%	65%	29.5%	—
Proportion	1: 1.3		2.2: 1		—

Figure 1 shows 70.5% of the audiences assumed that soft news programs characterized by the extended news reporting covering women's care and foster, philanthropy that are distributed by the family and the society such as leisure, entertainment, fashion and consumption be responsible by hostesses. But only 35% of the audiences thought the soft news should be responsible by hosts. On the other hand, 29.5% of the audiences believed that hard news, namely the senior significant serious news, should be assumed by hostesses, while the percentage of the audiences who considered the hard news should be the male's responsibility accounted for 65%. Thus we can learn from the above figure that most of the audiences accept the point of view: the technology, legal, economic and other hard news programs should be presided by hosts; while the entertainment, leisure, life and other soft news programs should be distributed to hostesses.

1.1.2 The Sexual Discrimination Reflected from the Weakness and Marginalization of the Discourse Power against Women as Media Subjects

Chart 1 objectively reflected the imbalance distribution between hosts and hostesses both in soft and hard news due to their different gender. This phenomenon, presenting objectively, not only derived from the media's acknowledgment but also the audiences'. Through further analysis, we can learn that most of the audiences are unaware that the distribution imbalance of hostesses in columns is due to the gender limit and discrimination, let to make a sense of the weakness of the hostesses' discourse power alone. Above conclusion is based on the research in which the number of the hostesses within the whole CCTV has got its rising. However, they didn't realize the essence of the feminine representation: women in media have been marginalized, especially been depreciated culturally from men's view.

1.2 The Sexual Discrimination and Marginalization of the Discourse Power against Women as Media Objects

1.2.1 The Weakness and Marginalization of the Discourse Power against Women as Media Objects

In modern mass media, although the participant rate of the female objects has gone up increasingly, it is still less than that of the male objects. Furthermore, during the process of media commercialization, women have been materializing, commercializing or even deforming progressively. Women have been viewed as the weak whose voice and discourse power has been neglected in all the fields of mass media.

As shown in Figure 2: Feng Yuan published in 1998 *Women in the News -- a Research on 8 Leading Newspapers* issued her research results from the Eight Leading Newspapers : People's Daily, Guang Ming Daily, Legal Daily, Economic Journal, Farmer's Daily, China Youth Daily, Workers Daily, Wen Hui Daily. The statistics show that the male characters in terms of occurrence frequency, news cited frequency and photographed frequency are far more than women. They are overwhelming in words and pictures news: of the newsmakers whose speech are quoted on the news, males reached to 91 % while females only amount to 9%. Of the male newsmakers, who own their important professional identities such as political leaders, enterprise group leaders accounted for 70%, while female newsmakers who own political identity only take up 18.7% (FENG Yuan. 1998).

Figure 2

The Neglect for Women Content			The Depreciation, Marginalization, Deformity for Women		
Leading newspapers	TV Media	Movie	Magazine	Advertisement	Internet
Male: 91% Female: 9%	Special Women Program: 22% not in prime time	Male: Leading role Female: Supporting role	2/3 Cover picture are women	51.6% females' occupation: housewives	23.5% Pornographic Websites (derogatory female image)

The survey on the TV stations across 32 provinces and municipalities indicate that only 7 TV stations have their own special woman programs, the percentage of which is only about 22% (GUI Yu-fang, 2006).

In Movie, males play the leading roles while females act as the supporting roles, for example, *The Oranges Got Mature* and *Chinese Divorce*, etc.

In the magazine field, certain relevant research has demonstrated that among those magazines for the youth with larger circulation, there are more than 20 species, over 2/3 whose covers pictured with the beauty (GUI Yu-fang, 2006).

From 2004 to 2008, Zhao Zhi did a further study on two magazines: *Family* and *Woman Friend*, the most representative women's magazines, the results showed that these two representatives neglected attaching any attention on the differences of the female objects, which were incorporated in the following factors: as for age, it mostly focused on young women objects, but the elderly were excluded; when it came to areas distribution, city females were regarded as the key, while rural women were overlooked; In terms of profession, it mainly focused on science, teaching, culture and health, etc. while the leadership were on the low side; however, in fact, more and more women elites entered the industries traditionally being viewed as the male professions such as IT industry, machinery and electronic communications industry (ZHAO Zhi, 2009).

In the advertisement, the researches showed that 51.6% of female occupations were for housewives, they seriously lacked the deserved discourse power in political, economic and various social areas, while males were account for 47% in science-education-culture-health and leadership managers (GUI Yu-fang, 2006), compared to women, they had more power or voting rights in various social fields.

On Internet, a new form of media, the contents of the web site such as female beauty, parenting, losing weight, helping the husband and bringing up the children as well as sex knowledge predominated over others like the concerns for women's cause, physical and mental health, and the demands for information diversity. According to a famous Chinese internet web searching A V's research, until May 1st, 2003, those web pages involving pornography accounted for 23.5% (GUI Yu-fang, 2006), which seriously damaged the women's dignity in the way of unhealthy for female image, Thus the female images have been so tremendously distorted, however, of those negative images of the deformity, males were absent.

Xun Jie conducted a quantitative analysis over the contents of women channels in three big web sites: Sina, Sohu, and Netease, from which, we can get the results that the realistic society patriarchal culture has been reproduced; the positive effects of efforts to provide effective information for women's survival and development, to promote gender equality as well as to narrow gender differences is far less than the negative effects of its one-sided female image (YANG Li-yang, 2009).

In 2006, before Women's Day, March 8th, a survey conducted by Beijing Journalists' Association indicated that among those newsmakers, females only took up 19%, while males accounted for 81%; in the scale of spokesman, experts and critics, women only covered 10%, however, the scale of women, as family roles, was three times more than that of men. Only 5% reports strengthened the gender inequality,

those challenged gender inequality only made up 1%. Thus, in news events the male's utterance hegemony still overwhelms the female discourse (ZHU Ying, LIAO Zhen-hua, 2008).

1.2.2 The Sexual Discrimination Reflected from the Weakness and Marginalization of the Discourse Power against Women as Media Objects

Figure 2 reveals the gender discrimination hidden behind the marginalization of the female discourse power within various fields of media, when women role as the objects in media transmission:

In Newspapers, TV and Film Medium, women's contents have been ignored. In mainstream news reports, the proportion of men's occurrence is far more than women's. Women and women's issues in the news reported frequency is very little. Men appeared in various types of programs, while women cover narrower range. For example, in *Yang Lan Interview*, a program on TV, the objects interviewed by the outstanding female hostess Yang Lan are mostly successful entrepreneurs, statesmen and financial giants, etc, among them males are predominant.

In magazines, advertising and Internet field, the female image has been marginalized, deformed, and even been depreciated. In advertisements, female images manifest the impression upon their external images such as body appearance and shape, etc. Women are often regarded as the victims of violence or degrading pornography image in the media. Modern media create beauties and the female images through various ways which result in materializing and commercializing female images.

2. THE REASONS OF THE WEAKNESS AND MARGINALIZATION OF THE FEMALE DISCOURSE POWER IN MASS MEDIA

2.1 Historical Reasons outside Media: the Feudal Historical Tradition

Media embodies the value bias and discrimination against women which does not exist independently in social and cultural system. It has a profound historical reasons.

Ever since a long time ago, the discrimination upon women caused by the feudal historical culture of "man is superior to woman" formed a kind of collective unconsciousness beneath the cultural roots. A continuation of thousand years of feudal patriarchal system exerts a great oppression and destruction upon Chinese women. Women are unequal to men in politics, economy, culture, social society and families. In politics, women are completely excluded out of the androcentric political life. In economy, women have no property ownership and inheritance, no stable economic income, being in absolutely dependant status, therefore, in the course of employment, discrimination from employers is not be avoided. In social life, women cannot get rid of the secular value left over by thousands of years' history: "obey her father before marriage, obey her husband after marriage, submits to son after the death of her husband", "males master outdoor life, females master indoor life". In China's traditional culture, the concept of "man is superior to woman" has been firmly established in all regulations in the patriarchal society. China's culture in the construction of the classes established gender order of "man is superior to woman". This kind of social gender consciousness rooted in the people's thoughts is one of the important reasons for the weakness of the female discourse in media.

2.2 From the Characteristics of Media Itself

2.2.1 The “Public” of Mass Media Appealing to the Backward Gender Consciousness

The “public” characteristic of mass media means transmitting public information to mass communication, which makes it tend to cater to the public psychology, including appealing to their implied backward gender consciousness. Mass media in social society is the important way to expand the mainstream culture and tradition. It has to reflect the historical accumulation of sexual discrimination. The medium model conceived of sexual discrimination in male culture, in turn, can reflect and highlight this culture. Because of the influence of this cultural background and the mainstream awareness, network media even if differ from traditional form of media has still no lack of patriarchal ideology.

2.2.2 The Commercialization of Media in Pursuit of Maximum Profits: the Commercialization and Materialization of Women

The media operation is popularly being commercialized. The pursuit of profit holds up the development of civilization. It commercializes all things possible to realize the sales of all possibilities, including stimulating the men who have more purchasing power to demand for women, thus the commercialization and materialization of women become a selling point.

Economists XUE Zhao-feng put forward, "discrimination" lies in the resource scarcity. Because something is not enough to satisfy everyone, so competition comes into being. Competition refers to that in the case of certain rules, people who won will enjoy the scarce resources. This principle of “do ranking according to certain rules” is actually discrimination. It turned out that, "competition" causes "discrimination" that directly related to economic factors. Since 1990s, the competition taking place in television industry has been developing in boom. Eventually TV media has been gradually transferring from the sellers’ market to the buyers’ market, from disseminator-center to audience-center. With the development of the commercialization in media, competition is inevitable, hence, to maximize profits becomes another important reason for the commercialization and materialization of female images.

2.2.3 Information Sources of Media: Social Organizations

The information sources of mass media are social organizations, especially in the early development of mass media, this kind of organizations often have close contacts with the state power, the social core organization which is entitled the most typical gender characteristics. Women have been only delivering their own voice marginally or seeking for the male spokesperson (HUANG Han, 2002).

2.3 Lack and Vagueness of Women’s Gender Consciousness

Owing to the influence of historical patriarchal value and the media’s catering to the audiences in pursuit of their own interests, the female subjects forced by the two external pressures tend to identify with this phenomenon. This kind of phenomenon reflects that the female subjects become the victims of mass media. Women become the “Spiral of Silence”. When most of the media females recognize "symbolic reality" and return to the so-called "female domain", even if a small group of women still holds the "equality consciousness", they at length has to become a "silent spiral" under external big environment.

The traditional gender discrimination concept leads to females’ vague gender consciousness without little awakening, while most women subjects consciously or unconsciously be imperceptibly influenced and then become the “Spiral of Silence” (the “Spiral of Silence” is a political and mass media theory, put forward by Elizabeth's Emanuel Spiral in *The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion—Our Social*). According to the point, if people think his or her own viewpoint is the minority of the Public, they will not be willing to spread their opinions but if they think that most people agree with their opinion, they will bravely speak out it (West Richard, Tuner H. Lynn). Mass media attach main attention on The Majority View to create “the Climate of Mainstream Opinion” so as to influence and restrict the Public Opinion.

The formation of the Public Opinion does not result in social public rational discussion, but the convergence behavior, an irrational product--"the Climate of Opinion" exerts pressures on isolated people mandatorily to promote the agreement with "the Majority Opinion". This environment cognitive brings about the sense of stress and security which will lead to the spiral-like expanding process of "The Inferiority Opinions of Silence" and "the Superiority Opinions of the Spiral Shouting" within interpersonal contact, and give birth to "Majority Opinion" with overwhelming superiority (GUO Qing-guang). The discourse silence behaves in the way of passive echo of the mass climate profoundly embodied the passive and vagueness of female awakening consciousness in pursuit of their free discourse power and their independent personality.

Therefore, women, in order to get the same discourse power with men, at first must free themselves from the secular gender discrimination concept, dare to challenge the male's exclusive discourse power and establish free, independent and individualized female subject image in transmission. They should not become the spiral of silence. It is the first step to win the equal discourse power with men that females should fundamentally liberate themselves from the vague, passive gender consciousness.

3. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE FEMALE DISCOURSE POWER IN EQUALITY WITH THE MALE AND THE ELIMINATION OF SEXUAL DISCRIMINATION

3.1 Suggestions for the Female Media Subjects: to Establish the Individualized Women Brand Image in Pursuit of the Right of Decisions Equal to Men's

The Female subjects in the media, in order to break up a dilemma to win the discourse power of equality with men, should cultivate a unique character charm and establish independent female brand images (LIU Ping, 2009).

Firstly, the female subjects must be equipped with full knowledge and enrich themselves with professional knowledge. Only with the excellent professional knowledge can they win more discourse power in programs. Secondly, the female subjects must cultivate communicative skills such as keen insight, independent thinking and the ability to make decisions which are the basic qualities and abilities deserve to the media subjects. Finally, the female subjects should be close to daily life, approach to the masses and spread people's language vividly.

The female mass subjects willing to display their personality charm lies in depending on a brand column. For example, in *Across the Taiwan Straits*, the hostess' sharp tough shaped a unique, impressive anchormanese. The relationship between the media subjects and columns is more like a relationship between fish and water. Furthermore, the audience's identifying with columns also depends on the representation of media subjects' charm. Therefore, to realize the maximum transmission needs media subjects acting as spokespersons for columns. In a word, the media subjects should rely on columns so as to dig out, cultivate self personal charm, striving to play as spokespersons of brand columns. When it comes to the female media subjects, it is necessary to square up and strengthen their physiological gender and social gender sense, to express them naturally rather than passively and restrictively.

3.2 Suggestions for the Media Organizations: to Correct the Women Workers Value and Increase their Strength on Decisions-making Level

To eliminate the sexual discrimination suffered by female media practitioners, it is most important to correct the media's gender concepts. Media organizations should assume their own social responsibilities: actively resist the behavior of damaging female image or weakening women's voice; not to cater for the businessmen and the audience who deliberately ignore or marginalize the female media objects image. In practice, it is crucial to do the reasonable arrangement of female workers, to conduct

regular professional training, to improve their professional qualities and give them more opportunities for self-expression and self-realization, to highlight their hard power in decision-making, to encourage them to get out of the family and win the discourse power equality with males'; put a stop to the distortion and depreciation against the female media objects image which was caused by commercial profits.

3.3 Suggestions for National Organizations: To Ensure the Female Discourse Power Equality with the Male, Conduct Timely Monitoring and Eliminate Sexual Discrimination

The existence of the marginalization of female discourse power has a profound correlation with social gender system. In order to solve these problems fundamentally, it is necessary to completely change the unreasonable social gender system, to establish the legislation to maintain the rights and interests of women and relevant supervision mechanism such as drawing up the law for protecting female portraiture right, working out severe punishment rules against pornographic websites, guaranteeing the proportion of women in decision-making, etc. However, the final elimination of gender discrimination depends on the improvement of social democracy and civilization. National organizations assume an inescapable responsibility of eliminating gender discrimination that is a huge project for human civilization. National organizations should make a great effort to take effective policies, systems, methods and measures to eliminate gender discrimination

3.4 Suggestions for Education Institutions: to Strengthen Gender Equality Education and Eliminate Traditional gender concepts

It is a long run to progressively change the traditional gender concepts formed by thousands of years in China, which needs our joint efforts of several generations. In the education field, it is an important way to strengthen gender equality education. Only through the thorough education of correct gender concept, can our whole social democracy and civilization be improved. Only the progress of human civilization can eliminate the traditional concept of gender discrimination, can help people to set up correct gender concept and completely get rid of sexual discrimination left over by the feudal traditional culture.

In short, it is of a great significance and imperative to establish the correct gender theory in the media theory.

CONCLUSION

In today's mass media, due to the high speed development of information, though women's occurrence frequency both as the media subjects and objects is growing fast, their deserving discourse power has been gradually moving towards the edge in a hidden way. The reasons of which can be classified into two factors: One is the social reason that the feudal historical tradition--"male master outdoor life, female master indoor life" prevent the female from pursuing the discourse power equal to men's. The mass media is characterized by commercialization, public, and taking social organizations as the information sources, because of which, the female voice is becoming weakened and marginalized. The other reason is from women themselves that women's pursuit and thought confined their own development. It is fairly necessary to eliminate the female voice marginalization and sexual discrimination and to further strengthen the equality between men and women. The mass media organizations should work hard in providing the opportunities for women to win the equality with men and give full play to its individual potential, so as to create the unique female brand image and realize the equality discourse power. Women should also make unremitting efforts for equality discourse power.

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