Unscripting the Patriarchal Script: Gender Identity in Media Ads

KARTHIKA S

PGT English at Placid Vidya Vihar

Kottayam

Kerala

Abstract:

We are surrounded by gender lore from the time we are very small which is the first scene in patriarchal script. It is present in conversation, humour, conflict, style of food etc. Gender is embedded so thoroughly in our institution, our actions, and our beliefs and even in our likes and dislikes.

Media plays an important role in the way we understand gender as part of our identity, history, social institution and everyday lives. My paper tries to explore how media ads at the same time build gender and move away from gender to a luminal space with reference to Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of "Sign" and Struggle between colonized and colonizer. The development of non-traditional practices in recent years has contributed to scripting new patterns which carve out a third space that is quasi gender. Cultural changes are in state of flux, which bring changes in gender order, the social structures that in turn shape the gender practices.

Unscripting the Patriarchal Script: Gender Identity in Media Ads

We are surrounded by gender lore from the time we are very small. It is ever-present in conversation, humour, and conflict, and it is called upon to explain everything from driving styles to food preferences. Gender is embedded so thoroughly in our institutions, our actions, our beliefs, and our likes and dislikes, that it appears to us to be completely natural. The world swarms with ideas about gender – and these ideas are so

commonplace that we take it for granted that they are true, accepting common adage as scientific fact.

Have you ever wondered why the aisles in toy stores are colour-coded pink for girl toys and blue for boys? Why certain foods and drinks are marketed to women, while others are marketed to men? Why advertisements for male pickup trucks use male voices and fast paced editing? Why women are supposed to like romantic comedies while men are supposed to like action films?

Media creates meanings about gender, and plays an important role in the way we understand it as part of our identity, our history, our social institutions, and our everyday lives. Gender is a word we hear in everyday conversation. It is commonly used to describe an individual's identity as male or female. However, the term "gender" is actually more complicated, and needs to be distinguished from one's sex (male/ female). Sex is a system of classification based on a combination of biological and physiological factors (genitalia, chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive organs). Biology is not always distinctly male or female, as there are some who are born as "intersex," with some variations in chromosomes or sexual organs. Gender refers to the cultural meaning that is ascribed to a person's sex. We can think of gender as a social construct, an idea, or ideology, a way of seeing. It is not set in nature like biology. Because gender is a lens or social construct, it means different things in different parts of the world and at different times in history.

In the famous words of Simone de Beauvoir, "Women are not born, they are made." The same is true of men. The making of man or woman is a never-ending process that begins before birth- from the moment someone begins to wonder if the foetus will be a boy or a girl. And the ritual announcement at birth that it is in fact one or the other instantly transforms an "it" into a "he" or a "she" (Butler 1993), standard assigning it to a lifetime as a male or as a female. This attribution is further made public and lasting through the linguistic event of naming. Thus the dichotomy of male and female is the ground upon which we build selves from the moment of birth. Note the scripted terminologies ascribed to male and female:

When we discuss gender, we use the terms "masculinity" and "femininity" to identify a set of characteristics, values, and meanings. The meanings of masculinity and femininity play a central role in how we understand people -- male and female individuals— and ourselves. In Western society (that is, in countries like the United States and Western

Europe), we historically have adhered to certain ideas and values that define masculinity and femininity.

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Masculinity	**Femininity**
• strength	• weakness
• dominance	• submission
• aggression	• compliance/vulnerability
• independence	• dependence
• empowerment	• disempowerment
• active	• passive
• rational thought	• emotion
• production	• consumption
• breadwinner	• nurturer
• subject	• object
• outdoors	• indoors
• technology	• nature

Ferdinand Saussure's concept of *'Sign'* argues that words do not refer to the objects they stand for. Language is a system of signs. Individual components of this system can be understood only in relation to one another, and in relation to the system as a whole, and not in relation to any external 'reality' that exists outside the system. A word is just a linguistic sign consisting of two inseparable parts, like the two sides of a coin; they are *'Signifier'*- the sound image, *'Signified'* – concept to which signifier refers. A sound image becomes a word when it is linked with a concept. The relationship between the *'Signifier'* and *'Signified'* is arbitrary. The yoking of words with concepts is the result of a social contract, and cultural conventions. There is no law governing the intrinsic relationship between the two, it is only a matter of social customs bound by cultural requirements. Signifiers do not refer to things in the world but to concepts in the mind.

Our perception of the world is a result of the conceptual framework that is innate to man as part of his consciousness. Language is the most fundamental way by which we convey our belief from one generation to another. Today media plays as important role as language in imprinting these beliefs. The important thing to remember is that masculinity and

femininity are not only oppositional; they are also hierarchical. The values tied to masculinity, by and large, have been seen as superior to those associated with femininity. This does not mean that men are superior to women; rather it suggests that the characteristics associated with masculinity are culturally valued above those associated with femininity. In our culture, we tend to value strength over weakness. We value being rational over emotional. We value independence over dependence. Given that masculinity and femininity are embedded with cultural values and meanings, it's important for us to think about how those meanings circulate in our everyday lives and the media. We need to consider the way our thoughts, values, and media representations are gendered-the way in which femininity and masculinity shape.

Many of the items are purchased based on assumptions about what it means to be a boy or a girl. Girls get pink flowers, butterflies, and dolls. Boys get blue trucks and balls.

Until World War II, the colours pink and blue were not exclusively assigned to either sex. In fact, some sources from the early 20th century indicate that the social rules were reversed: boys wore pink and girls wore blue. This does not mean that gender did not matter in previous eras. Quite the contrary, it simply shows that our understandings of gender norms are socially constructed and can vary in different times, cultures, and contexts.

Assumptions about what are right or appropriate for girls and boys has an influence well beyond whether their room is painted pink or blue. Gendered assumptions often lead to very different codes of conduct. Girls play quietly and gently, and it's ok for them to cry. By contrast, boys "rough house" and should always be tough, never showing emotion. When boys and girls don't adhere to these "rules" or assumptions, they may be criticized or ostracized. Children are therefore often socialized or encouraged to perform specific gender roles and conform to gendered norms. These norms are circulating all around us. We see them acted out by our peers, family members, and role models. We see them in school, at work, in politics, and in the media.

We think of emotion and desire as natural, but in fact both are highly structured and learned. It is generally said that the taboo against men crying or showing fear requires

men to learn to control their emotions. This is certainly true, and many boys and men can attest to how difficult such control can sometimes be.

Following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, many Americans watched obviously brave and tough men from New York City police and fire departments weeping unashamedly for their friends and colleagues and for many others who died in the World Trade Center. Since then, news media have speculated that we are moving into a new era in which men no longer need to control their tears. More likely is that there will be more acceptances of men's tears in some contexts but there will still be gendered constraints on crying and other expressions of emotional vulnerability.

The focus on male control of emotion misses the fact that there is a good deal of socialization involved in women's learning to display their emotions to others, learning when to cry or show fear to an audience. It is appropriate for women to shed public tears, for instance, upon the death of an acquaintance, and it is appropriate for women to show fear in the face of physical threat. Acting scared in action or horror movies can be an important female skill. Learning to be immune to fear in these situations, and learning to not be immune, is alternative possibilities - gendered alternatives which is not appreciated by structures.

It may seem natural that men go to work and women stay home. It may seem natural that men are warriors and women are sex objects. It may seem natural because we see these images over and over again. These images are repeated in the movies and television we watch, the books we read, and in the conversations we have with friends and family. They become familiar, and we tend to treat them as if they have always existed as natural facts.

Often the roles men and women play in media echo and reinforce the ideas and values tied to masculinity and femininity. Men and boys might take on the role of hero, protagonist, do-er, while females might be more passive or nurturing. When women do take on the hero role, they may simultaneously be objectified and sexualized. In the professional world, men might have more powerful jobs as politicians, athletes, corporate leaders, while women may take on more marginal roles or be valued for their appearance.

To the extent that some activities and spheres have greater power and prestige than others, a division of labour can also be a division of value. Across societies, the gendered division of labour involves deferential power and status. Men's activities – those that are guarded the most closely as men's domain- involve greater societal power, through the disposition of goods and services and the control of ritual. Males in most cultures have more access to positions of public power and influence than females. While women sometimes wield considerable influence in domestic settings or in other non public domains, this influence is limited by the domain itself. Since the private sphere is dependent on its place in the public sphere, the domestic woman's ultimate position in social order is dependent on the place of her male relatives' positions in the market place. And her ability to exert power and influence in the private sphere depends on how these men allocate the goods that they gain in the market place.

In his book *Masculinities*, Robert Connell (1995) counters the notion of "true masculinity," emphasising that masculinity like femininity is not a coherent object, but part of a larger structure. The masculine ideal throughout society involves physical power. A global man has to look trim in a suit, his hands have to be clean and uncalloused,and his movements have to be dignified. Women are expected to be small and delicate,with a carefully maintained body down to the smallest detail.just as physical strength is expected of all men, this delicacy is expected to some extent of all women.

Redefining through merging of boundaries

	Gendering	Non-gendering
Clothes	• Seemati • Jolly silks	• Levis • Craftsvilla
Physical appearance	• Parachut • Dhathri • Fair and Handsome	• Kingfisher • Cadbury Eclairs • Spice

Social position	• Horlicks • Vim dishwash • Prestige	• Pril aqua fresh • Cukos oil • oreo

Most of the products that we buy are imported from different parts of the world and America is one among them. Last hundred years it was Britain who colonized Indians spiritually now American is trying to colonize by selling their products and making Indians an addict to their product. For this they use advertisements as per the ideologies that prevail in India and thus make economical benefits.

The force of gender categories in society make it impossible for us to move through our lives in a non -gendered way, and impossible not to behave in a way that brings out gendered behaviour in others. At the same time, the maintenance of gender categories depends on reinforcement in day to day behaviour. Male and Female could not persist as structurally important social categories if we did not perform enough in gendered and gendering behaviour- if distinct groups of people did not continue to act like "Women" and like "Men." In other words, the gender order and social categories – male and female- on which it rests, exist by virtue of social practice.

The development of non traditional practices in recent years have contributed to scripting new patterns which carve out a third space that is quasi gender, thus has brought changes to the gender order, the social structures that in turn shape gender practices. Like the Saussure's concept of 'Sign', sound image becomes a word when it is linked with a concept thus gender too is a result of social construct. The relation between 'Signifier' and 'Signified' is arbitrary as well as gender. Structures and practices are in dynamic and dialectical equation.

There is always the possibility for change – about things happening, about creativity and intelligence at work in the space left open by the incomplete hold of ideologies and institutions. It's important to think critically about how gender plays a role in the way we produce and consume stories, images, words, and characters. This will help us gain a better understanding of the world around us, help us decide whether we think certain

representations promote the types of values we believe in, and help us come up with ideas for how we might work to change things for the better.

Not only in USA and India, advertising plays both a reflecting and shaping role for men and women. It is important to recognize advertising's strength and use the power of advertising to portray more realistic images of men and women. As ads are part of mass media it is from them the change is to be started.

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