

**Abstract for the Conference “Gender Mainstreaming in Media – Experiences from the Region”, Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 4 – 5 February 2009**

**Jelena Višnjić, Program Coordinator “Voice of Difference”, Belgrade, Serbia**

## Media Representation – Production of the Femininity Image

Media are presenting public life through debates and dialogues, and are showing what is currently happening in a society. If you are not represented in media, it is as you do not exist. Because of that, it is important for the perspective of equal rights for women and men under same conditions to „occupy“ media space. In one society that wants to present itself as a democratic oriented, both male and female reality should be equally important and “visible.”

However, mass media worldwide are still indicators of male domination, although there is a trend and confirmation of conquering media space and media related professions by women. Media are mirror of social reality, but also its primary architects, which define our lives, behavior models, and value systems.

Through policy of media representation, we can bring light to paradigm of portrayal of women, as well as “symbolic capital” transferred by patriarchal matrix and incorporated into their activities, roles, and bodies.

Although *objective portrayal* of reality represent media’s job, they actually “present and portray” it in absence. For certain audience, media re-create a portrayal; re-present an object, a person, a process in their absence. Media are recognizing, naming, and symbolically fixating reality.” (S. Milivojević, 2004:12) As analytic object of media, reality is various and multiple, therefore media are exposing to the process of “type structuring” the portrayals they are processing. The result is simplified image against diversity of reality, production of stereotypes, instead of critical portrayals of reality.

Media appearance of women mostly fits into traditional frameworks, and has a task of revitalization of patriarchal relations of gender division of social roles. In conservative communities of traditional views related to position of women, media are still projecting deep-rooted stereotypes, and with doing this, they are directly influencing on slowing down the processes of reconstruction of gender roles.

Masculinization of media is characteristic for those communities, as well as the absence of educational contents about gender relations, which would have wider influence on public opinion through mentioned communication channels. Such symbolic reflection of inequalities is slowing down and hampering creation of different world - world of equality. With implementation of defined desired gender roles, and with daily repetition of deep-rooted portrayals of *masculinity and femininity*, media are socializing for inequality.

Shaping of women’s gender role in mass media image was never problematic. Gender roles were consistently divided, and for a long time, portrayal of women was within their family and

sexual function. Initial intention was to keep women within their face and body, regardless of appearing manifestations, meaning that women need to fulfill their anatomic function within media portrayal.

“Analysis of roles in which women appear when they deserve media visibility reveals that informative print applies almost the same criteria as revival print. The most important women’s public engagement is entertainment one. Usually one-half of photographs, in some newspapers even two thirds of women on photographs are entertainers, singers, fashion models, and TV-personalities. Entertaining roles of women are only threatened by women’s roles as house-mothers, housewives, wives, escorts of successful men. Professionally successful women are frequently appearing as wives or mothers, or they at least have to reveal their recipe for reconciling *career and family*. “ (S.Milivojević, 2004:17)

On the other hand, there is visible increase of television fashion magazines, as well as TV programs about *modern woman*, which are establishing new criteria and tendencies in (quasi)emancipation of women, creating modern female archetypes, and with their contents, they are creating one parallel reality that cannot be inducted in individual lives of average women.

Women authors of these TV programs are constructing one new female stereotype, which is seemingly all free from traditional schemes. Image of ideal women reproduced by these TV programs is completely utopist, and additionally frustrates women, just as previous their second-class position. Purist repression is replaced with another one, more subtle, and this is repression of plastic perfection.

Modern woman is trying to overcome traditional role and establishment, and with setting herself free from all external repressive mechanisms, she is getting trapped in auto-repression. Ideal of *modern woman*, married, naturally with kids, career, and still she is a good housewife, all modernly dressed up with a make up – this is image that represents cornerstone of a society. Regardless of emancipation logic and massive refusal to be an object, women remain to be *instruments* and not the subjects in creating and testing of social reality.