

The Changing Perceptions of Gender Equality in Media and Popular Culture

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ABSTRACT

This journal explores the evolving perceptions of gender equality in media and popular culture, examining how various forms of representation have influenced societal attitudes toward gender roles over time. By analyzing of media from films, also from survey to various groups of ages. this study investigates how narratives surrounding gender equality have shifted in response to cultural, social, and political movements. Key themes include the portrayal of strong female characters, the deconstruction of traditional masculinity, and the intersectionality of race, class, and sexuality within gender discourse. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to the exploration of the the evolving perceptions of gender equality in media and popular culture.

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and is expressly recognized as such in the Constitution of 1945 and the law of the Republic of Indonesia all citizens are united in law and government and are obliged to exercise that law and government with no exceptions.” (Article 27, paragraph 1 of the 1945 Constitution). As quoted above, the Indonesian constitution has affirmed equality among citizens regardless of gender. This is certainly an important foundation in continuing the struggle and ideals of R. A. Kartini to achieve justice for women in Indonesia. She wanted equality, and Kartini hoped that women would not become "second-class" citizens or submit to men. That’s why, in this modern era, gender equality has become popular, and gender equality has evolved in media, literature, public opinion, and popular culture. The statement of gender equality has been enshrined in the foundational laws of many countries, but despite this, significant obstacles still persist in achieving true gender parity. These challenges can stem from deeply ingrained cultural norms, institutional biases, economic disparities, and lack of access to resources. As a result, activists, artists, filmmakers, writers, and communities have increasingly turned to both visual and written works as powerful tools to advocate for gender equality. These forms of expression serve not only to raise awareness but also to inspire action, challenge stereotypes, and promote social change.

Visual media such as films, documentaries, art, and social media campaigns have become central to conveying the lived experiences of marginalized genders and the complex, often hidden, dynamics of inequality. Through these mediums, activists can depict the personal, social, and

political aspects of gender struggles in a way that resonates on an emotional and intellectual level, transcending the barriers of language and policy.

Written works, from essays and manifestos to novels and poetry, also play a crucial role in framing the conversation around gender equality. They offer space for reflection, analysis, and the exploration of alternative visions for a more just society. Whether it's the powerful narratives of gender nonconformity or the scholarly critiques of systemic oppression, written works contribute to a larger dialogue about gender, power, and justice. These efforts reflect a collective ambition to evolve societal understanding and advance the cause of gender equality. However, the work is far from complete. The evolution of gender equality requires continual dialogue, sustained activism, and a commitment from all sectors of society—government, civil society, corporations, and individuals alike. Through ongoing advocacy and the creation of thoughtful, evocative works of art and literature, we can hope to inspire progress and move closer to a world where gender equality is not just an ideal, but a lived reality. in this journal also shows that the popular culture of gender equality has also developed through surveys about gender equality

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Gerda Lerner (1986), Gender is the cultural definition of behavior defined as appropriate to the sexes in a given society at a given time. Gender is a set of cultural roles, sex-gender system refers to the institutionalized system which allots resources, property, and privileges to persons according to culturally defined gender roles. Gender is viewed as a social, cultural, and psychological construct imposed on individuals based on their classification as male or female (Mcelhinny, 2003). It is important to differentiate between sex and gender; sex refers to biological, psychological, and anatomical traits that are generally immutable, while gender roles can evolve according to societal norms and expectations. The portrayal of gender roles in media and popular culture has evolved significantly over the decades, reflecting broader societal changes. In the early to mid-20th century, media representations often reinforced traditional gender roles, with women depicted primarily as homemakers and men as breadwinners. For instance, television shows from the 1950s, such as “Leave It to Beaver”, exemplified this dynamic, portraying families where women were subservient to men (Orenstein, 2016). According to a study by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, only 31% of speaking characters in family films were female during this period, indicating a stark gender imbalance (Smith et al., 2019).

Over the decades differences in gender equality have evolved following various equality issues, patriarchal culture forms the view that men are stronger, dominant, and have more power than women, so women who are seen as weaker can be easily hurt physically and emotionally (Jufanny and Girsang, 2020). Beginning in the 18th century, particularly after the Enlightenment, women began to challenge the inequalities they faced in various aspects of life, including legal, political, economic, administrative, social, and cultural spheres. They recognized their disadvantaged roles in society and initiated efforts to address these issues. The pursuit of equal status, rights, and freedoms alongside men gave rise to the concept of feminism in the mid-19th century. The feminist movement, which emerged in the 1960s as a response to the social oppression of patriarchal structures, has experienced significant conceptual and epistemological changes over time (Taş, 2016: 163-164). These various problems and opinions have led to changes in equality from decade to decade, giving rise to various terms such as feminism and men's rights. These movements and issues have led to the evolution of gender equality in media and popular culture. In recent decades, the representation of gender in media and popular culture has undergone a significant transformation, reflecting the broader societal shifts towards greater gender equality (Mazières et al., 2021)(Scharrer, 2013). Content analyses of various media formats, including films, television shows, and advertising, have consistently documented the underrepresentation and sexualization of female characters, as well as the perpetuation of traditional gender role stereotypes (Ward & Grower, 2020). However, researchers have also noted some positive changes, suggesting a gradual, albeit uneven, progress in the portrayal of gender in media.

The pervasiveness of gender-biased representations in media has been a subject of extensive scholarly inquiry, with researchers exploring the complex interplay between media content, audience perceptions, and the development of gender-related attitudes and behaviors (Mazières et al., 2021) (Ward & Grower, 2020). Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated a small but consistent association between frequent media consumption and the expression of more stereotypical beliefs about gender roles and expectations, particularly among young audiences . These findings underscore the powerful influence of media in shaping individuals' understanding and internalization of gender norms, which can have far-reaching implications for their personal and professional aspirations.

Media representations of gender equality have a profound impact on audience perceptions and behaviors. Research has shown that exposure to diverse and equitable portrayals can influence

viewers' attitudes towards gender roles, shaping their understanding of societal norms and expectations. A study conducted by the Geena Davis Institute found that children who watched programs featuring strong female characters exhibited more progressive views on gender equality compared to those who viewed traditional gender roles (Smith et al., 2019). Furthermore, the rise of social media has amplified the influence of media representations on public discourse. Platforms like Instagram and Twitter have become spaces for advocacy, where users share content that challenges traditional gender norms and promotes gender equality. Hashtags such as #MeToo and #TimesUp have sparked global conversations about sexual harassment and gender-based violence, demonstrating the power of media in mobilizing social movements (Harris, 2020). A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center indicated that 60% of social media users believe that these platforms play a crucial role in raising awareness about gender issues (Pew Research Center, 2021). However, the impact of media representations is not always positive. Studies have shown that exposure to hypersexualized portrayals of women can reinforce harmful stereotypes and contribute to a culture of objectification. For example, a report by the American Psychological Association found that media depictions of women as sexual objects can negatively affect young girls' self-esteem and body image (APA, 2017). This highlights the need for critical engagement with media content and the promotion of healthier representations of gender.

Moreover, the effects of media representations on audience perceptions can vary across different demographic groups. Research indicates that individuals from diverse backgrounds may interpret media messages differently based on their own experiences and identities. For instance, a study by the Journal of Communication found that Black women often face unique challenges in media representation, leading to different perceptions of gender equality compared to their white counterparts (Harrison, 2021). This underscores the importance of considering intersectionality when analyzing the impact of media on audience perceptions. Strong female characters have played a pivotal role in reshaping narratives around gender equality in popular culture. The emergence of these characters has not only challenged traditional gender stereotypes but has also provided audiences with relatable role models. For instance, characters like Katniss Everdeen from "The Hunger Games" series and Wonder Woman from the DC Comics franchise have become symbols of empowerment and resilience, resonating with audiences across various demographics (Harris, 2020).

Research has shown that the presence of strong female leads in films and television can positively influence viewers' perceptions of gender roles. A study conducted by the Annenberg

Inclusion Initiative found that films with female protagonists had a more significant impact on audiences' beliefs about gender equality compared to those with male leads (Smith et al., 2020). The portrayal of women as multifaceted characters who navigate complex challenges not only fosters a sense of empowerment but also encourages discussions about gender equity in society. Moreover, the representation of strong female characters has also been instrumental in deconstructing traditional masculinity. As these characters exhibit traits traditionally associated with masculinity, such as strength and assertiveness, they challenge the notion that these traits are exclusive to men. This shift is evident in shows like **Buffy the Vampire Slayer**, where the titular character embodies strength while also grappling with vulnerability, thereby presenting a more holistic view of gender (Jowett, 2019).

However, the representation of strong female characters is not without its critiques. Some argue that the portrayal of women as "strong" often relies on the exclusion of femininity or emotional depth, reinforcing the idea that to be powerful, women must adopt traditionally masculine traits (Cohen, 2021). This perspective highlights the need for a more nuanced approach to character development that embraces the complexity of female experiences without conforming to rigid gender norms. The role of strong female characters in popular culture has significantly influenced societal narratives surrounding gender equality. While they have provided empowering representations and challenged traditional gender roles, it is crucial to continue advocating for diverse portrayals that encompass the full spectrum of women's experiences. As media continues to evolve, the challenge remains to ensure that these representations contribute meaningfully to the broader discourse on gender equality. The impact of media representations on audience perceptions of gender equality is multifaceted and complex. While diverse and equitable portrayals can foster progressive attitudes and drive social change, negative representations can perpetuate harmful stereotypes. As media continues to evolve, it is essential for creators and audiences to engage critically with content and advocate for representations that promote gender equality and inclusivity.

METHOD

The descriptive method serves as the backbone of this research, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of how media representations of gender equality have transformed over the years. This approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of historical and contemporary portrayals, capturing the complexities of societal attitudes toward gender roles. By comparing

different media representations across various time periods, the author effectively illustrates how assumptions about gender equality have evolved.

In this research journal, the author uses descriptive and quantitative methods to describe differences in media and popular culture assumptions regarding gender equality from time to time. By explaining the differences in depictions of gender equality along with the development of past media to today's media. To be more specific, author created data from survey results according to public audiences in three age groups—15-25, 26-36, and 37-47 in order to get the specific different from varieties age perfective, so that this journal will explore how representations, narratives and attitudes of society have changed over time, highlighting the progress achieved and the challenges that still exist. In media author compare the film that the plot that has been change conditioning in this era therefore that the gender equality has been evolved, Film, which is a medium for visually telling stories, continues to play an important part in the culture of the modern day. It is remarkable in its capacity to traverse barriers of geography, language, and culture, and as a consequence, it has the power to alter people's perspectives on the world that surrounds them. Literature is a reflection of the times, as well as the social conditions of society. This is also confirmed by Ratna (2009) which explains that literature lives in society, absorbing aspects of life in society. In addition, a literary work is also an intersubjectivity in which people find their image in a work. Therefore, through the reading and visually literary works it allows us to understand not only the social conditions of society, but also about what is the mindset of a group of people at a certain age. In addition, over time and the progress of The Times, attitudes, as well as problems in social Society also change.

This change can be called development, considering that humanity always goes forward. The development of ancient thought into modern, as well as the problems in modern Society, which also change depending on the existing conditions, can all be seen through literary works that are present in a group at any time. To clearly see how they differentiate, we can use comparative literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research examined the evolving assumptions and representations of gender equality in media and popular culture through descriptive and quantitative analyses of survey data. The findings reveal significant generational differences in perceptions of gender roles, highlighting how these views have been influenced by changing media portrayals over time. We compare the plot of the films Cinderella (2015) and Cinderella (2021) in order to analyze the elements of gender

equality evolution. Data collected from participants in three age groups—15-25, 26-36, and 37-47—indicates contrasting attitudes and understandings of gender equality. Younger respondents (15-25) tended to exhibit more progressive views on gender roles, likely reflecting the influence of contemporary media representations that promote inclusivity and equality. In contrast, older age groups (26-36 and 37-47) displayed more traditional attitudes, which may stem from the historical context of media portrayals that reinforced conventional gender norms.

Evolution Gender Equality in Media: On the plot Cinderella (2015), Cinderella (2021) Cinderella (2015)

The film tells the story of Cinderella, also known as Ella, who endures hardship after her father's death, living with her mother and step-sisters. Cinderella is treated poorly, forced to perform tasks typical of servants, and is despised by her stepmother and sisters. One day, longing for happiness, she wishes to attend the royal ball but is forbidden to go. In her sorrow, a fairy godmother appears and transforms her into a stunning beauty, allowing her to attend the event. With the help of magic, Cinderella dances with the prince until the clock strikes midnight. After the party ends, the prince searches for her using the glass slipper she left behind and eventually finds her. Thus, the story concludes happily with Cinderella marrying the prince.

The popularity of this tale has even influenced social sciences, leading to the concept of the "Cinderella complex." Despite the charming narrative, this term has negative connotations, suggesting a lack of personal development. Dowling (1992) explains that the Cinderella complex refers to a psychological dependence in women, characterized by a strong desire to be cared for and protected by others, particularly men, alongside the belief that external forces will come to their aid.

Cinderella (2021)

In this film, Cinderella (Camila Cabello) is an ambitious young woman dreaming of starting her own business, "Dresses by Ella," while enduring the cruelty of her stepmother Vivian and stepsisters. Prince Robert (Nicholas Galitzine) is pressured by his father, King Rowan, to find a suitable bride after rejecting Princess Laura. King Rowan organizes a ball, inviting all eligible women, while discouraging Robert's sister, Gwen, from participating in state affairs.

Cinderella catches Robert's eye during a guard-changing ceremony, and they later meet at the market, where he buys a dress from her. He invites her to the ball, hoping to help her sell her creations. However, Vivian sabotages Cinderella's preparations, but her Fabulous Godmother (Billy Porter) magically transforms her, allowing her to attend the ball. At the ball, Cinderella meets

a visiting queen, Tantiana, who offers to take her on as a dressmaker. Despite Robert's proposal, Cinderella declines, wanting to pursue her career instead. As midnight strikes, she flees, leaving behind a glass slipper.

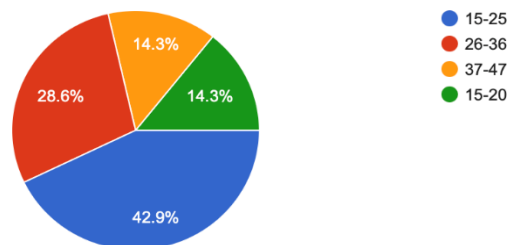
The next day, Vivian reveals her own ambitions and past disappointments to Cinderella and attempts to persuade her to marry Robert. Meanwhile, King Rowan insists Robert must marry Princess Laura, but Robert laments his feelings for Cinderella. With support from Queen Beatrice, King Rowan eventually agrees to let Robert marry for love.

Robert finds Cinderella after she escapes from Vivian's plans, and they confess their love. They decide to travel together to showcase Cinderella's designs, despite the implications for Robert's future as king. Ultimately, King Rowan announces that Gwen will now be first in line for the throne, allowing Robert and Cinderella to be together as they embark on their new journey.

In the "Cinderella (2015)", film reflects traditional gender norms and the "Cinderella complex," emphasizing passive femininity and reliance on male figures for happiness. In contrast, "Cinderella (2021)", film actively promotes themes of female empowerment, ambition, and independence, challenging outdated stereotypes and presenting a more nuanced portrayal of gender equality. This evolution mirrors broader societal changes regarding women's roles and aspirations.

Data from survey results according to public audiences in three age groups

The data collected from the Google form that authors made that filled by audiences from various age groups. These generational differences suggest that exposure to diverse media narratives plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' beliefs about gender equality. As the media landscape continues to evolve, it is imperative to consider its impact on public perceptions and the ongoing discourse surrounding gender roles. The findings underscore the need for continued advocacy and education to foster a more equitable understanding of gender across all age groups.



Generational Perspectives on Gender Equality

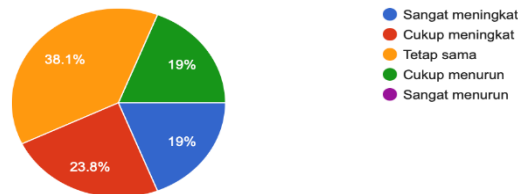
1. Older Generations (26 and above)

- **Perceptions of Change** : Based on the survey data, the authors found that the older age group demonstrated a more traditional view of gender roles, often mirroring the

patriarchal norms prevalent in the media during their formative years. Many participants indicated that media portrayals of women primarily emphasized domestic roles and sexualization, which they linked directly to the societal norms of their youth. These participants reflected on how the media of their time often reinforced stereotypes, portraying women as homemakers or objects of desire, thereby shaping their perceptions of gender roles.

When asked, “How has the representation of men in media and popular culture changed in the last decade? (For example, men are not just busy working but also participate in household activities.)” participants noted significant shifts in the portrayal of masculinity. Many acknowledged that contemporary media increasingly depicts men not only as providers but also as active participants in household activities. This change reflects a broader societal recognition of shared responsibilities in domestic settings, challenging traditional notions of masculinity. Several respondents emphasized that today’s media often portrays men engaging in parenting, cooking, and other household chores, which was less common in the past. This shift not only highlights the evolving roles of men but also contributes to a more balanced view of gender dynamics. Participants expressed that these new representations promote a healthier understanding of masculinity, where emotional expression and domestic involvement are encouraged.

However, some older respondents also expressed concerns that while these changes are positive, they can sometimes feel superficial. They pointed out that certain media portrayals may still reinforce outdated stereotypes by presenting men in overly simplistic or exaggerated ways, such as the “dad who can’t cook” trope. This suggests that while progress has been made, there remains a need for more nuanced and realistic representations of men that reflect the complexities of modern family life. Overall, the findings indicate a notable transformation in how men are depicted in media and popular culture, with a growing emphasis on egalitarian relationships and shared domestic responsibilities. This evolution not only impacts societal attitudes toward masculinity but also encourages younger generations to adopt more progressive views on gender roles. Participants recognized that these changes are crucial for fostering a more equitable society, where both men and women can engage fully in all aspects of life, both at home and in the workplace.



- **Awareness of Inequality:** While acknowledging progress, older respondents expressed skepticism about the extent of change in gender representations, often citing ongoing issues such as pay gaps and underrepresentation of women in leadership roles.

2. Younger Generations (15-20)

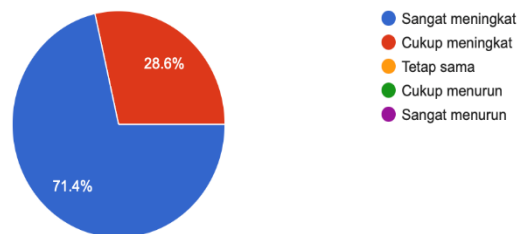
- **Acceptance of Fluidity:** Younger participants demonstrated a more nuanced understanding of gender, often embracing the concept of gender fluidity and questioning traditional binaries. This perspective aligns with contemporary media portrayals that increasingly reflect diverse identities. Many respondents from the younger demographic articulated their belief that gender is not fixed and can encompass a spectrum of identities beyond the male-female binary. This openness to fluidity represents a significant cultural shift, highlighting a departure from rigid definitions of gender that have historically dominated societal narratives.

Moreover, younger participants noted that this evolving understanding of gender is well-represented in modern media. They pointed to various examples, such as television shows and films that feature characters who embody or explore different gender identities. These representations not only validate the experiences of individuals who identify as non-binary or genderqueer but also promote acceptance and understanding among broader audiences. By showcasing diverse gender expressions, contemporary media plays a crucial role in fostering a more inclusive society.

In addition to fluidity, many younger respondents identified recent media examples that challenge traditional stereotypes, such as strong female protagonists and nuanced male characters. They highlighted films and shows where women are depicted as leaders, innovators, and complex individuals, rather than merely supporting roles. Similarly, they noted an increase in portrayals of men that break away from stereotypical depictions of masculinity, emphasizing emotional depth and vulnerability. This recognition of positive trends in representation indicates a broader cultural shift towards more equitable and multifaceted portrayals of gender.

According to the survey results, participants across all age groups agree that gender equality has evolved over generations. This consensus reflects a growing awareness of the changing dynamics surrounding gender roles and expectations in society. Respondents acknowledged that while progress has been made, challenges remain. Many expressed a desire for even greater representation and inclusivity in media, particularly for marginalized identities.

From the question, "In your opinion, how has the representation of women in media and popular culture changed in the last decade?" participants consistently noted improvements in how women are depicted. They emphasized that recent media has shifted towards more empowering narratives, allowing female characters to take center stage in diverse and meaningful ways. This shift represents a collective acknowledgment of the importance of gender equality in shaping societal attitudes and fostering understanding. Overall, the findings illustrate a promising trend toward greater acceptance and representation of gender diversity in media and popular culture.



Progress and Remaining Challenges

While there have been notable advancements in gender representation in media, challenges persist. Both groups recognized that despite progress, issues such as gender-based violence, wage disparity, and underrepresentation in leadership roles remain critical concerns.

- **Acknowledgment of Progress** : Participants across both age groups acknowledged the progress made since the 18th century and the feminist movements that followed. However, older respondents were more cautious in their assessments, often highlighting the need for continued advocacy and action.

- **Call for Continued Advocacy** : Younger respondents expressed optimism regarding the future of gender equality, emphasizing the importance of ongoing activism and media literacy to further challenge stereotypes and promote diverse representations.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights significant generational shifts in perceptions of gender equality, influenced by evolving media representations. The findings reveal a clear divide between younger and older generations, with the former exhibiting more progressive and nuanced understandings of gender roles. This shift is indicative of the transformative power of contemporary media, which increasingly showcases diverse identities and challenges traditional norms. Younger participants demonstrated a remarkable openness to fluidity in gender identity, often embracing the idea that gender is not fixed and can exist along a spectrum. This perspective reflects broader societal changes and aligns with the growing visibility of non-binary and genderqueer individuals in media narratives. In contrast, older respondents often expressed more traditional views, mirroring the patriarchal norms that were prevalent during their formative years. Their perspectives were shaped by media portrayals that primarily emphasized domestic roles for women and stereotypical masculinity for men. Despite the progress acknowledged by participants across all age groups, critical issues such as gender-based violence, wage disparity, and underrepresentation in leadership persist. Both older and younger respondents recognized the importance of continued advocacy and education to address these challenges. Many participants noted that while media representations have improved, they are not sufficient to combat systemic issues that affect gender equality. For instance, participants highlighted the need for policies that support equal pay and protect against gender-based violence, which remain pervasive problems in many societies. Younger generations expressed optimism about the future, emphasizing the need for ongoing activism and media literacy to further dismantle stereotypes. They indicated that understanding the influence of media is essential in shaping attitudes toward gender roles and that education plays a crucial role in promoting equality. Many respondents advocated for inclusive educational programs that address gender diversity and empower individuals to challenge outdated stereotypes.

The comparative analysis of the "Cinderella" films underscores the evolution of gender representation in popular culture. The traditional narrative of "Cinderella" (2015) reflects outdated norms that reinforce passive femininity and dependency on male figures. In contrast, "Cinderella" (2021) embraces themes of ambition, empowerment, and independence, aligning with contemporary values of gender equality. This evolution in storytelling not only reflects societal changes but also plays a critical role in shaping public perceptions of gender roles. Furthermore, while progress in media representation is evident, challenges remain regarding the portrayal of intersectionality. Many participants noted that mainstream media often overlooks the experiences

of individuals from marginalized communities, such as people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those with disabilities. This lack of representation can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and limit the understanding of gender equality as it intersects with other social issues. As media continues to evolve, it is crucial for researchers, advocates, and creators to engage in dialogues that promote equitable representations. By fostering a more inclusive media landscape, we can contribute to a deeper understanding of gender equality and its implications across all age groups. This approach not only highlights the importance of representation but also emphasizes the need for a collective effort to address ongoing challenges. By prioritizing diverse narratives and actively challenging stereotypes, we can pave the way for a more just and equitable society.

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