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Media and women image: A Feminist discourse

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Female bodies have been exposed to a maximum possible extent through print and visual media globally. The physical impression of women body has been used to sell several consumer products, viz., food to floors, from creams to cars, from perfume to popcorn. The standards of beauty being imposed on women by external sources are much debated and complicated process and need to be understood within the age old socio-culturally milieu. In addition, the political economy of ‘women image’ and its commercial exploitation by selling and purchasing ‘beauty’ and consumption of it also requires serious attention. Hence, a theoretical discourse is developed being based on content analysis to cross-examine the representation of women around the patriarchic cultural notion of ‘beauty’ and its commoditization in commercial space through media. The paper further explores the social dynamics of ‘female body’ and reconstruction of ‘femaleness’ through socio-cultural process of ‘gendering’ and ‘popular media’. The discourse revolves around how and whether the ‘reconstruction of female body’ could be dissected in search of ‘real image (Changing the ‘image of beauty’ in real sphere of womens’ life and life style) of a woman’ with a special focus on Indian society.

Key words: Gender; Media; beauty and objectification.

INTRODUCTION

“We don’t need Afghan style burqas to disappear as women. We disappear in reverse – by revamping and revealing our bodies to meet externally imposed vision of beauty” – Robin Gerber

Female bodies have been exposed over the decades to a maximum possible extent through print and visual media globally. The physical impression of women body has been used to sell almost all consumer products such as food to floors, from creams to cars, from perfume to popcorn across continents. Popular film and television actresses are shown becoming younger, taller and thinner day by day as projected by the visual media. Some of these women have been known to faint at the work place due to lack of food intake (The Times of India, Mumbai, 25th April, 2010). Gerber thinks that women’s magazines are adequately fed with information giving out advice that if they can just lose those last twenty pounds, they’ll have it all—the perfect marriage, loving children, great sex, and a rewarding career (Robin Gerber, 2009).

The standards of beauty being imposed on women by external sources are a much debated and complicated process and need to be understood within the age old socio-culturally induced milieu. In addition, the political economy of ‘women image’ and its commercial exploitation by selling and purchasing ‘beauty’ and consumption...
of it also requires serious attention in the debate. Hence, a theoretical discourse needs to be developed to cross-examine the representation of women around the patriarchic cultural notion of ‘beauty’ in the media and its commoditization in commercial space across the globe. ‘Changing the ‘image of beauty’ in real sphere of women’s life and lifestyle also needs to be studied. The author wishes to expand the debate further by analyzing the social dynamics of ‘female body’ and reconstruction of ‘femaleness’ through socio-cultural process of ‘gendering’ and ‘popular media’. The discourse revolves around how and whether the ‘reconstruction of female body’ could be dissected in search of ‘real image of a woman’ with a special focus on Indian society.

**Women Body and Power Dynamics: A theoretical interpretation**

According to feminists discourse, there is a complex dynamics that exists among power, ideology, language (symbolic and semiotics) and its practice within a context of its socio-cultural milieu that could be manifested in the form of “doing gender” or “performing gender” (identity trouble or confusion). It is suggested that gender is a property, not of persons themselves but of the behaviours to which members of a society ascribe a gendering meaning. For example, being a woman involves appropriating gendered behaviours and making them part of the ‘self’ that she presents to others. Repeated over time, these behaviours may be internalized as “me”—that is, gender does not feel like a performance or an accomplishment to the actor (the social agent), it just feels like ‘her’ “natural” way of behaving. The visual or print media, in the same way provides a stereotyped image, an imposition which has to be internalized by ‘women’ and exhibit their ‘beauty’ that suits to the popular and dominant perception of the larger community.

Socio-cultural standards of feminine beauty are presented in almost all forms of popular media, projecting women images that portray what is considered to be the “ideal body.” Such standards of beauty are almost completely unattainable for most women; a majority of the models displayed on television and in advertisements are well below what is considered healthy body. Mass media’s use of such unrealistic models sends an implicit message that a woman, if considered to be beautiful, must resemble a model recognised by the popular culture. “Feminist theorists have attempted to recover the subject and “subjectivity” to address this issue of “body, image and identity”.

Several scholars from mainstream of feminist school like structuralism or post structuralism have shared their views on this subject. Weedon (1997), a scholar in the feminist poststructuralist tradition, has sought to integrate individual experience and social power in a theory of subjectivity. Weedon defines subjectivity as “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of self, and her ways of understanding her relation to the world. This world could be also the world of popular media and her ‘effort’ to connect with the same.

Judith Butler (1990), another scholar in the same genre, explains that the ‘performativity’ of gender offers an important contribution to the conceptual understanding of processes of subversion. She argues that subversion occurs through the enactment of an identity that is repeated in direction that goes back and forth resulting in the displacement of the original goals of dominant forms of power. Virginia Woolf (1929) challenges the very assumptions underlying nominal categories encompassing “all women,” deconstructing particular notions about the ways in which power and identity have been gendered. Foucault (1990) reconceived “subjectivity as subjected, docile body enmeshed in relation of power. He says the ‘effect of power’ upon body results in reduction of social agent to passive bodies – though his argument lacks a rounded theory of ‘subjectivity’ or agency and is in conflict with the fundamental feminist struggle to re-discover and re-experience womanhood (Mclaren, 1997, “Foucault and the subject of feminism”).

Lacan (2001) argues that the subject loses some sense of autonomy upon realizing that ‘she’ is a visible object. This concept is bound with his theory of the ‘mirror stage’, in which a child encountering a mirror realizes that he or she has an external appearance. He suggests that this gaze effect can similarly be produced by any conceivable object such as a chair or a television screen. This is not to say that the object behaves optically as a mirror; instead it means that reflection of any object can induce an awareness of it as an object. Mulvey (1975) identifies the male gaze in consonance with Lacanian argument that ‘Femininity’ is a social “construct” and that the feminine object, the object of desire, is what male perceives about female body withholding the positive identity of female as a fellow human. The concept of subjectivity and the means by which cultural norms and interpretations (or dominant social processes) call women into being, emphasises them ostensibly as subjects. This image problematically depicts a women as “she,” rather than an unproblematically “we,” which is indicative of the emerging politics of post-feminist inquiry (Butler 1990, 1993). Such an argument indicates that there is an unequal power relationship between viewer (male) and ‘viewed’ (female), gazer and the gazed and, therefore, leading to women ‘objectification’. Frauke (1997) examined the media representation of one of the most popular singers Cher, a woman who underwent cosmetic surgeries many a times (1987-1995) to suit to popular media and her image could be a prominent example of power dynamics and the politics of female body that exhibited objectification, stigmatization and reconstructed body image and women beauty’ documented by various newspapers, media news channels in Germany and in the US during her hey-days of popularity.
Other than commercialization, based on objectification of women ‘image, body and beauty’, during 90’s the feminist movement identified incidences of women victimization due to such ‘subversion created by popular culture in various visual and print media. It led to many social problems like domestic violence, equal pay, and workplace harassment. The key concern remains the same even in the post modern era particularly, for the present discourse, wherein author would like to focus on the intersection of various new shades of popular culture through media projection of the women body, (at any age cohort). ‘Body, image and identity’ crisis - “called into being” in popular feminism, usually leads to ‘false identity’ and reconstruction trap of “real” into something “in vogue” encouraging patriarchic gaze, viewing, pleasure and acceptability.

Emerging Feminist Schools of Thought and Role of Media

The “first wave modernity” gave fillip to the establishment of democratic state globally resulting in creation of institution to promote knowledge and empowerment through education for its citizenry (female). This was followed by a second wave of “modernity” concretizing ‘empowerment’, that is, earning one’s own living through employment generation and equal opportunities for the citizens irrespective of gender creed caste colour. Gender roles of women got diversified and more highlighted and diluted the stereotyped ‘gender roles’ entrenched deeply in social fabric. This encouraged individuals (post 90’s) to create their own identity, structure and become part of a changing social order especially for women. The media played here a dominant role globally, to substantiate and encourage modernity touching all aspects of life. Propagation of modernity created separate space for women to gain professional status and identity but was riddled with dilemmas and conflicts between old age narratives and images of contemporary popular culture. It resulted in “inequity” within the gender-class itself: women who crossed the threshold of modernity (advance) and those who failed (backward) in social imagery.

Women became empowered to choose “a life of their own” and also a ‘lifestyle’. The scholars of Foucault’s school of thought and feminist writers like Rose (2000) warned that such ‘space and power’ ‘freedom of choice’, “the shaping of being”; and the “inculcation of a form of life” could be a tool for exploitation by the male patriarchy. Similarly Bauman (2001) lamented the sheer unviability of naked individualisation as the resources of sociality (and welfare), leaving the individual to self-blame when it eluded ‘him or her’. Maclean thought that in Marxian ideology ‘individualisation’ could be considered as the curse of capitalization led modernity and therefore could be viewed as ‘non-welfare’ to masses/society. Post modern media projection of women image clearly exhibits power struggle of women to embark upon ‘freedom of space’ while being trapped in their own re-constructed image. The space for “emancipatory politics” therefore has given way to live politics in the dynamics of social change. Ulrich (1992), Giddens et al. (1994) as “reflexive modernisation”. (20\textsuperscript{th} Century Syndrome).

Proceeding viewpoints represent various schools of thought in recent feminists’ discourse like social comparison, cultivation, self-schema and so on. Each perspective has helped researchers examine mechanisms by which the media images were translated into induced body image in women psyche. These thought also explain as to why some section of female populace remain vulnerable to the detrimental effect of the media, while others display remarkable levels of resiliency. It is important to mention here that the “vulnerable one are being trapped into media projection and the resilient are those who withstand the pressure of ‘trendy demand’ of ideal women and remain’ as they are’ and therefore could be called as “normative discontent” section of the society (Striegel-Moore and Franko, 2002, Tiggemann and Slater, 2004).

Cultivation theory for example states that women who match the socio-cultural ideal of beauty excessively prevalent in popular media and that repetitive exposure to images influences viewers abilities to decipher that projected standards in the media are unrealistic. As females constantly view images of tall, thin women that appear in different forms of mass media the cumulative effect over a time frame is that many are lured to accept unrealistic standard of beauty as "reality." Many women come to view ultra-thin females to be "normal," and thus conclude that any woman who does not meet the image is "abnormal" (Schooler et al., 2004; Tiggemann, 2003).

The pervasiveness of the media makes it very challenging for most women to avoid evaluating themselves against the projected socio-cultural standard of beauty. These images reinforce amongst most women the message that "you’re not good enough" (Milkie, 1999) Most companies that target women in the media actually attempt to foster social comparison with idealized images, to motivate women to buy their products that will bring them closer to the ideal (e.g. food products, cosmetics, hair products etc.). If women see a discrepancy between themselves and the images they view in advertisements (which surely is prevalent) they will be more tempted to buy the advertised products (Thompson and Coovert, 1999). Schooler et al. (2004) validates the above point in his observation below:

“Consistent representations on television construct a specific portrait of reality, and repeated exposure to this content leads viewers to adopt this alternative reality as valid. Accordingly, because the representations of women’s bodies shown on television are so skewed, adopting this reality for young women is believed to lead to decreased satisfaction with their own bodies, a strong.
desire to be thinner, and disordered eating behavior”.

On the other hand, social comparison theory provides a certain level of explanation for how media images actually come to impact the way women feel about their bodies. It examines how individuals evaluate themselves in relation to peers, groups, and/or social categories (Milkie, 1999). Depending on the target of comparison, a person will usually judge himself as either better or worse on some dimension. An upward comparison occurs when an individual compares himself or herself to someone who fares better than himself/herself. In contrast, downward comparisons involve a person comparing himself or herself to someone who is not as well off as himself in a certain dimension. In general, upward comparisons have been found to correlate with depression of mood, whereas downward comparisons are more likely to elicit elevation of mood (Lin and Kulik, 2002; Schooler et al., 2004; Tiggemann, and Slater, 2004). Mass media is seen to be one of the most dominant and commanding influence, especially on women in defining oneself. Television, advertisements, magazines, and other forms of popular media provide a plethora of references for upward social comparison. Images in the media generally project a standard to which women are expected to aspire, yet that standard is almost unachievable for most of the women (Schooler et al., 2004; Thompson and Coovert, 1999).

Self-schema theory states that women use three points of reference to perceive their physical appearance: the socially represented ideal body, the objective body, and the internalized ideal body. The portrayal of women by the media and other important individuals in her life influences the conception of socially represented ideal body, that is, social expectation with respect to physical appearance and beauty. In contrast, the objective body involves a person’s own evaluation of her body. A person’s satisfaction and dissatisfaction with regards to his physical appearance is contained within this dimension; individuals almost always have some opinion about their (self) physical demeanor. The internalized ideal body involves the level at which an individual endorses the ideal image and aspires to achieve it. Some women can be exposed to images of thin women and may not internalize such standards of appearance because they know that they are unrealistic. In contrast, some women’s internalized ideal is very similar to the socially represented ideal, which makes them particularly vulnerable to the powerful effects of the media (Sands and Wardle, 2003).

It is almost impossible to alter society’s representation of what is considered to be an “ideal body.” Despite powerful evidence that the media’s unrealistic depiction of females has negative effects on the way women view themselves, companies in television and advertising seem to be unyielding in their marketing approaches to widen the chasm. This may come from the mindset that “thinness sells” while using heavier woman could not be as profitable (Dittmar and Howard, 2004). While it is difficult to change the way the media portrays women, there may be hope for altering women’s internalized ideal body image to reflect something that is realistic and attainable. If women can be taught not to internalize the socioculturally projected ideal, they may be able to counter the negative effects of the ultra-thin images that are almost inescapable (Sands and Wardle, 2003).

Media Trapping of Women Image, Body and Self

As already discussed the ‘projection of women body and image’ is the focus of this study, and how it has subversive impact on the women consciousness pushing them into trapping of “performing gender” as perceived by male to a large extent to meet visual pleasure and to be accepted in the familial social clout in particular, where women themselves are “leading the role of doing gender” under a subtle entrenched process of ‘objectification’.

Big billboards of ‘wonder-bra’ advertisement showing famous model looking down admiringly at her substantial cleavage (Williamson 1987), in a TV advertisement (1998/9) another supermodel, Claudia Schiffer, took off her clothes as she descended a flight of stairs in a luxury mansion on her way out of the door towards her new Citreon car, or woman wrapped with snake posed nude (1995 Tuff Shoe, Sunday Mid Day dated July 23) are the prime examples of “sexist ads” that started in the early 90’s. Post liberalized era has experienced more bold exposition of women body (nudity) through advertisement, film, and “ad captions” (“Hello Boys” to “Are You Just Pleased To See Me?” as cited in Williamson, 1987) which simply provokes “enacting sexism” and reconfirming process of “objectification” and commoditization of women image and body. These ads corroborate ‘gaze theory’ voiced by various feminist scholars (Mulvey 1975; Rosalind Coward 1984; Teresa de Lauretis 1988 etc). ‘Nudity’ or exposition of female body as argued by feminist critics (Foucault, Wolf, Weedon) as part of gender exploitation and power dynamics is instantly dismissed by many as an antidote. Furthermore, the recent tag “my body is my art” (Kathy, 1997:27) “being slim slender is being healthy” – a new mantra (chanting) for modern lifestyle to promote fitness centres, cosmetology centres, liposuction centres in urban townships and metros is representation of exploitation. The lifestyle which gave them umpteen scope for consumption leading to obesity and related diseases now invokes a further demand to cut off calories, shape up in few hours, ideal food habit and therefore retaining ideal body. Such newly emerging demand for ‘freedom of space and therefore voluntary exposition of ‘body’ could be termed as “female individualisation” as mentioned by Mclaren (1997) who borrowed the idea of ‘individualisation in post modern society as a human trend. Various sociologists like
Giddens (1991), Beck (2002), Bauman (2000) and so on have observed that modernity lead 'individualisation assert individuals as self-monitor and that there appears to be greater propensity for 'female individualisation' (Mclaren, 1997).

Images in the media today project an unrealistic and even dangerous standard of feminine beauty that can have a powerful influence on the way women view themselves. From the perspective of the mass media, thinness is idealized and expected to be considered "attractive." By woman images in advertisements, television, and music usually portray the "ideal woman" as tall, white, and thin, with a "tubular" body, and fine glowing hair. The author would like to pinpoint the emergence of billion dollars industry globally to bridge, the gap between the real and ideal beauty contours. There is interesting statistics on various beauty procedures purchased by women to bridge the gap between ideal and real image showing the numbers of kind of beautification undergone by women especially in five countries (refer Annexure I). The media is littered with images of females who fulfill these unrealistic standards, making it seem as if it is normal for women to live up to this ideal. (Dittmar and Howard, 2004; Lin and Kulik, 2002; Sands and Wardle, 2003; Schooler et al., 2004), Dittmar and Howard (2004) made this statement regarding the prevalence of unrealistic media images:

Ultra-thin models are so prominent that exposure to them becomes unavoidable and 'chronic', constantly reinforcing a discrepancy for most women and girls between their actual size and the ideal body.

To meet this media triggered gap between body image and real body billion dollars industry has sprung up globally (Annexure I). Magazines and advertisements are marketed to help women "look better" by providing information and products that are supposed to make them look and feel good. Women read these magazines with the hope that if they follow the given advice, they will be more appreciable and attractive. Marketing strategies lure women into purchasing the idea of looking better rendering powerful influence on their sense of self appearance. Tiggemann (2003) found that frequent magazine reading was consistently correlated with higher levels of body dissatisfaction and disturbed eating. The study also found that women who read fashion magazines displayed higher levels of thin-ideal internalization, which is a powerful risk factor for development of weight anxiety and disordered eating patterns. In addition, to weight dissatisfaction and eating pathology, studies have shown that women who view slides of pictured in many mainstream magazines and advertisements show increased levels of depression, stress, guilt, shame, and insecurity (Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw, and Stein, 1994). Thus print and media projection about 'ideal body image and beauty becomes instrumental in determining perception of millions of viewers of TV and readers of 'beauty' magazines and newspapers are guided by the media projected contours of beauty and grace for women and internalise it as yardstick to view women.

The impractical physique that is considered optimal by the media continues on well past young girls, influencing women of all ages. As girls become older, they loose interest in dolls and the like, and gain interest in fashion, cosmetics, and the entertainment industry. The typical fashion model is between fifteen and twenty two years old, is a minimum height of five foot eight, and has an average weight of 108 to 125 pounds. Therefore, the average model is significantly underweight and ideally young. This is a shame, because models are viewed as having glamour that many women covet. It's ironic that models have such a specific physical appearance, while they are advertising clothes for all different body types. Maybe if models varied in the shapes and sizes that all women come in, it would be easier for women without the model body type to accept her physical appearance (Figure 1).

But even the models that are advertising the clothes and products are not considered beautiful enough for those who make the advertisements. The majority of models in ads are far more imperfect then their photos on billboards and magazines. This is because models are, more often than not, airbrushed, photo-shopped, and digitally corrected, before the ads are ever introduced to the public. Natural body fat that is considered healthy by doctors and physicians is trimmed away, to skin and bone. The usual creases and shadows that make us look human are glossed over and obscured. The result - a disturbing fantasy of perfection that is unattainable by everyone, without the help of digital corrections. Let's face it; the products that are advertised never make us appear as promised in the ads. This is because the ads that sell them are fake.

In the entertainment industry, women are objectified. It's not often that you see a mainstream music video without several females, wearing practically nothing, draped across one man who is portrayed as their 'all and be all'. Popular songs that degrade women often make the top on music charts. They have lyrics such as: “I tell the h** all the time, B**** get in my car” (50 Cent, 2005) and “H* shake your a***” (Ying Yang Twins, 2003). Even the majority of famous women performers are not known for their talent, but their body. Popular actors and musical artists that are an example of this are Brittney Spears, Christina Agularia, Megan Fox, and Angelina Jolie (to name just a few). There are many people who argue that it's just business; yes, women in the media are unrealistically portrayed and hyper-sexualized, but this has no real bearing on regular women's self esteem. This, however, has been proven false. In a 2004 study it was found that sixty-eight percent of women strongly agree that the media and advertising set an unrealistic standard of beauty, which most women can't ever
Figure 1. Women Images, Body and Self shapes and sizes.

the media grossly interprets what is beautiful. It’s awful, but the mass media does have a negative impact on a woman’s self-worth and confidence (Sands and Wardle, 2003).

Women Body, Identity and Self Image: Indian perspective

Perception, projection and acceptability of women is much more complex phenomena in India than in the west. In Indian media, the projection of women as a ‘persona’ or as role model has varied largely between two extremes of a continuum; example is from “devi” to “damned”. In 70’s the real movement of feminism started with feminist scholars talking about rights, role status and identity of women in Indian patriarchy, and is yet struggling to gain clarity and acceptance of society, (Jain, 2011). Indian society has not changed its attitude towards women since the past 1500 years (Jain, 2011). He succinctly explained how the moral foundation of Indian patriarchic structure has narrowed down the role of women between two extreme “blessed” and “damned” Indian women especially representing urban class have been projected as self-independent, empowered, liberated and looking good in terms of “fair and lovely”, “thin and sexy”, “smart and fashionable” and also financially empowered as projected by the media in the last two decades. These images have reached largest no of households in India through TV channels and influenced the societal attitudes en-mass and women in particular. On the one hand women are still being exploited, used, victimized seen as an object of desire and second grade citizen in the family and society in India. These images when frequently shown on TV create dissonance among the women as the gap between real and projected body image, beauty and personality looks widening and frustrating. Media projection is far removed from reality has highly influenced women psyche, be it lower income middle or ‘rich n famous’ class; or urban clusters, damaging the traditional normative structure and institution of our society and especially making woman folks vulnerable to questionable products and attitude towards sculpted bodies as demanded by popular western culture depicting women as glamorous, sensual and charming. Films, television and advertisements all have been reconstructing women image by visual and print – prioritizing elegance and beauty. This projecting of women by the media is in extreme contrast with the traditionally known role of women as home-maker,
caregiver, mother and apostle of love and affection. Women image has been typecast with products like detergent powder, soap, cooking spices, oil, rice-grain etc., projecting utter sincerity towards family thereby confirming exploitation of her “role” in real social structure. On the other hand women are projected as urbane, smart, empowered symbolizing women power and, therefore, leading to willful exposition of body and objectification infringing their ‘space, and privacy over body. This is a dibololical image projection. It could be substantiated by a statement of Chakraborty (2012:10) that “…the narcissist ethos of consumerist culture militates against the communitarian orientation of Indian culture which values fulfillment of individuality within familial and kinship network”. Author would like to quote here Uberoi (2006) who argues that “the conspicuously globalised popular culture of the upper middle classes though a minority one, is less authentic than the conservative culture of the lower middle classes, or the mass culture manufactured for the urban working classes, the rural consumer and the socially dispossessed”. The media has created cultural clashes and classes.

In the post liberalized and globalised era in Indian society media has played very constructive as well as dubious role in projecting women body, image and beauty. It appears that culture and value exposition to society has taken a hit and economic/business considerations have largely guided media in this regard. The media’s contribution in promoting women causes and imagery can be divided into four categories as discussed below.

Commoditization and marketisation of women image and body

The media in the early 90’s used to be a means of reporting and broadcasting largely news and songs, films, music and less of product advertisements. The products like NIRMA detergent or LUX soap remained famous women’s foray to be advertised during that era. The media and the pattern of advertisements has entirely changed in the post globalised era and it has become a vibrant mode and tool to shape, mould and change public opinion and create markets and demand for different products by projecting slim, trim, sculpted woman bodies like a commodity. Be it homecare products, beauty products, telecommunication, IT products/computers/gizmo, food, or lingerie, the women body has been used unsparingly to advertise and market merchandise. In order to sell products reconstructed image of women with modified sculpted looks is presented before masses to influence their perception of an ideal woman rendering the woman a commodity in the process. Print and visual media by projecting, commoditizing, commercializing and reconstructing women image deceives the woman as to what is her real image: One projected in the media or one she herself carries or the one prescribed by normative societal structure!

Stereotyped gender induced projection of women image

In the last three decades, the media seems to have reinforced stereotyping by projecting women as homemakers, docile and tolerant to suit mass perception and taste, also amongst its avid consumers - the women who would buy particular product for their house, body and beauty. Thus in India, women on small or big screen still perform traditional role of washing clothes, invariably serving food to adults, craving for cosmetics to become more beautiful and displaying their clothes. A contemporary advertisement of a product ‘MOOV’ showed that the woman in the household is tired at the end of the day doing and finishing all her chores and suffering from backache, to her respite comes a rubbing cream ‘MOOV’ so that she can further work better to meet her family members whims and fancy? After using the miraculous balm, a barrage of orders began flowing from the whole family to make her serve it again like a machine!

Therefore, representation of real women varies from negligible to total exclusion and women in certain accepted professions are interviewed and talked more about their feminity than work/profession, or sharing their views on various social issues. Women are usually projected in gender based roles and linked with promotion of products but their real issues and personality rarely gets a chance to come out in the media whether print or electronic. Women achievers usually are subjected to irrelevant even distasteful queries asking them colourful and spicy details about their appearance and personal life, such as their penchant for beautiful sarees, visits to spa etc. to emphasise their feminine qualities not achievements. The media influences people’s psyche by repeatedly projecting woman as homemaker, mother, wife, docile, engaged in domestic chores serving the family and glue to family unit on the one hand and on the other as most mod semi-nude looks crazy slim-trim creating dissonance among all consumer of media whether print or electronic. The media repeatedly typecast women around their gender and exhibits their bodies to promote commercial products and services to sustain the gap between ideal body image and real image.

The whole contour of this discourse unravels projection of woman body image by the media on a bipolar basis, that is, powerful vs powerless. Deane (2008) puts forth that the media promoted the divide of same gender through generating lifestyle and promoting in small screen soaps showing class division within women population, a class exposed to pasta, jeans and tea shirts, gizmos, laptops and size zero fashion and the other suppressed and overtly oppressed often shown wearing sarees, believing in talisman and trantas, making ‘kheer’ as best
Figure 2. Women glamour, beauty and exposed bodies.

Glamourising Women Body

Promoting not only commercialized but glamorized image of the women is a major contribution of the media in the post globalised era. New faces of young and sensuous models selling soft drinks, perfume, laptops or expensive cars in a sizzling manner promote more glamour than the products.

During the post-liberalized market economy an increase in the working women population by multiple counts, and women emerging as partners in financial decision making, professors, doctors, managers or administrators has been conveniently ignored by the media. Surprisingly, projected women image has been more overtly impregnated with glamour quotient by the media again and again. Wykies and Gunter (2005:219) argued “…at best media images of the body are politically oppressive and commercially exploitative. At worst they may justify a young woman’s efforts at self annihilation. Thin, fair and beautiful underlined threat to women as it may lead health problems related to skin diseases, skin cancer affecting reproductive health and many other diseases like anorexia, bulimia, anxiety, insomnia etc., the media, in fact, celebrates body images of women through making models walking with launching lingerie in fashion shows, movies, thin celebrities exhibiting products of ‘size zero’ promoting blatant display of painted and well massaged svelte bodies in commercialization and exposition of glamorized body being subject of discussion in Kitty-parties and high society rich ladies. It harbours ‘glamour and beauty’ and capitalizes on fully exposed bodies (Figure 2). Baudrillard (1981) in his philosophical argument coins a term “representational discourse and imagery”, wherein he includes three components, simulation, a process in which representation of things replace the “things being represented”. This is a very problematic notion because it causes “de-humanization”; this process of the representation becomes more important than the “real-thing”. Signs are thought of as representing reality, Signs that mask the reality, Signs that mask the “absence of reality”. With this we enter a simulacrum, a state where signs have no relation with reality whatsoever. With Global mass media invasion, copies of copies of the same projection are created and bombarded on Human Retina. No longer the simulation reflects an original but reflects a simulation. With the mass media and fashion industry’s portrayals of women as beauty and sex object, there is absolute negation of ‘real woman’. The woman which we see in mass media or fashion shows portrays not the real but an image of a woman based on male libidinal expectations. The reconstruction of women image in the name of women rights and equality of gender is far removed from reality as women still suffer domestic violence and sexual slavery, honour killings, lack of participation in reproductive and abortion or financial decision making at home. The media successfully has glamourised not empowered the women at praxis level.

Failure to Disseminate Real Image, Issues and Social Change

Devereux (2003:9) “…mass media are an important agent of transformation and social change, they are inextricably bound up with the capitalist project and they
play a central role in the reproduction and continuation of various kinds of social inequalities at local, national and global level”. What the media has missed out is unraveling gender perspective and gender inequality to support women causes especially in India. Bathla (1998) argued that Indian media systematically ignored the need to raise issues of gender injustice and inequality. In contemporary India, women remain the second sex trapped in the triple bind of religion, patriarchy and capitalism. The media has rendered insufficient attention to women’s voices sometimes and conveyed that their concerns were irrelevant to democratic polity”. At best, the media has played dubious role: It has propagated the interests of commercial value frequently by promoting mod image of women and at worst it has stayed oblivious to the concerns of social change at attitudinal level to emancipate women (Figure 3). For media projection of glamourised woman body and image has been a matter of making money at the commercial level whereas social issues and change being a non money spinner has remained the least priority. The real women related issues want change in societal attitudes, perception and treatment of women as equal partners and the media has felt shy of propagating the social evils because there no money in such themes. The author would like to regret the artificial concern of the media in projecting real woman causes and image of an ordinary woman.

Conclusion

This thematic discourse tried to reflect how the media both visual and print in the promotion of popular culture in though has projected woman body and image with prime focus on catering to the male psyche tickling sensual pleasure in viewing ‘women body and image’ It also retained dominant patriarchal tint with emphasis on traditional normative practices to induce overtly or covertly the ideal image of women.

Keeping a theoretical interpretation that addressed
gender stereotype, women, image, body and self, the paper highlights a few contours of the theme such as gender stereotyping, gender commoditization and commercialization, objectification, exposition of women body and image as gender politics, gender inequality and division among gender (women) and so on. The media globally has reconstructed the women image keeping in mind its commercial benefits and projecting it to rake in profits by drawing a wedge between the ‘real image of women and reconstructed image’! It promotes normative shackle and stereotyping to feed the mass psyche about women image by projecting dichotomy: desirable object vs adorable being retaining incessant gender struggle in the social structure as is theme!

Be it pre independence, post independence, pre globalised or post globalised era women have been exhorted to reconstruct their image to suit to male perception of beauty and also to contemporary popular culture etc. Wonder bras, lingeries, deodorant, hair removing lotion fairness cream to attract the ‘male’ and be desirable. Only difference is in more exposition of body and reconstructing bold and beautiful women or meek and docile women and throwing it to the millions’ body and reconstructing bold and beautiful women or meek and docile women and throwing it to the millions’ perception and simply watch which sells most! Popular culture is reflected in popular media or vise versa.

The media is a tool of ushering in social change while maintaining continuity has erred more in the promotion of women body and image among masses by its projections than brought in the real image to the forefront. Largely a reconstructed image of woman’s body and identify as disseminated by the media has not served the cause of women fraternity creating a dissonance amongst the minds of everybody: the women, the observers, the readers and the viewers of the media.

Conflict of Interests

The author(s) have not declared any conflict of interests.

REFERENCES

Frauk F (1997). Making up Cher –A Analysis of the Politics of the
Annexure 1. Image enhancing procedures used by women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>Countries the data reflects</th>
<th>No. of Women data of 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Eye wide open blepharoplasty</td>
<td>Brazil, China, Japan, Italy, South Korea</td>
<td>11,00,000 (1.1 million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Breast reduction</td>
<td>US, India, Brazil, Japan</td>
<td>5,50,000 (5.5 million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vaginal rejuvenation surgeries or virgin plastics for prettier genitals</td>
<td>Brazil, China, Japan, US, India</td>
<td>67,600 (0.67 million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nip-tuck jobs</td>
<td>South Korea, India, Brazil</td>
<td>47,00,000 (4.7 million)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women who underwent beauty procedures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>plastic/non-plastic and other treatments</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,314,292</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Women who underwent beauty procedures</td>
<td>USA</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>2,517,778</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>China</td>
<td>1,265,160</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1,183,320,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>India</td>
<td>1,147,060</td>
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