Gender representation in Iran’s National Television and the Significance of
Critical Media Literacy for Iranian Women

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Abstract
Media culture plays a significant role in constructing gender identity, femininity and masculinity. Since the Iranian national TV tries to perpetuate gender oppression by oppressive representation of gender, this paper intends to discuss the importance of critical media literacy for Iranian women to perceive oppressive gender representation and to struggle against gender discrimination in Iran. From earlier academic discussions on gender representation in Iranian national TV series and advertisements, it has been identified that gender is portrayed based on patriarchal values and belief. The studies also indicate how the Iranian dominant group uses media such as television as an ideological tool to legitimize and naturalize sexist ideology. By focusing on a critique of sexist ideology and politics of gender representation, critical media literacy could empower Iranian women to understand the oppressive role of Iran’s national television productions in perpetuating male domination and to struggle against the dominant sexist ideology.

Key words: Gender ideology; Gender representation; Oppression; critical media literacy
1. Introduction

Media is an integral part of our life and acts as an important agent of socialization in this contemporary world. Its effects and functions on society in educating people are inevitable. Media could influence individual behaviors and personality and provides resources for individuals to form their identities. Media images help to shape the values of good or bad, positive or negative, and being moral or evil (Kellner, 2011). With respect to gender, media also provides the meaning of being male or female in a particular society. The representation of femininity and masculinity in media has a strong impact on women and men in shaping their identities (Damean, 2010). In short, media is a form of pedagogy which teaches an individual how to be a man or woman and how to conform to the dominant system of norms, values, practices and institutions (Kellner, 2011).

Considering the strong impact of media on our life in general and gender identities in particular, there is a need for us to read the media messages intelligently and critically. Critical media literacy is a crucial response, especially for oppressed groups such as women, to discern these effects, to critically analyze the oppression and create their own oppositional representation and identities.

This paper intends to discuss the importance of critical media literacy for Iranian women. By employing the findings of some studies on gender representation in Iranian national TV series and advertisements, the crucial role of critical media literacy is to be recognized for Iranian women. To achieve the above objective, this paper is divided into several parts. Firstly, the role of media culture on hegemony and perpetuating domination and also liberating and emancipating of subordinated people is considered. Secondly, gender representation in Iranian national TV is reviewed. Considering the importance and popularity of TV programs in Iran, this paper focuses on how “gender-of-intent” is constructed through Iranian national TV drama series and advertisements. Thirdly, critical media literacy is discussed. Critical analysis of media messages could empower Iranian women to understand the role of media; particularly the national television in perpetuating gender discrimination.

2. Media culture, hegemony and liberation

Hegemony is a term which was employed by Gramsci (1971), a Marxist theorist. Hall (1985) defines hegemony as dominance and subordination in the field of relations structured by power (cited in Lull, 2011). However, Lull (2011) argues that “hegemony is more than social power; it is a method for gaining and maintaining power” (p. 61).

In the 20th century, as Gramsci (1971) believed, ways and tools of gaining power and domination have changed. In his view, gaining and maintaining hegemony is not just by using physical force such as the police. Cultural tools such as the media, the schools, the family, and the church are perpetuating the continuity of hegemony. Hegemonic systems reproduce and spread their beliefs and values by using cultural apparatus such as TV, movies, video games, computers, music, dance, and other productions. Since producing and distributing a society’s cultural messages is an important way to reproduce society, the cultural tools for reproducing the dominant culture and transforming it into society has become a significant political issue (Giroux, 1983).
Producing common sense is one of the crucial strategies for practicing hegemony. When the ideas of the ruling group become common sense, they will be accepted by the majority, then their ideology would appear reasonable and their ideological task concealed (Fiske, 1990). Mass media has a critical role to play in legitimizing the ideological hegemony of the dominant class as common sense. “Media constructs hegemonic definitions of what should be accepted as reality, so the definitions seem to be predestined as true and commonsensical” (Carter & Steiner, 2003, p. 2). In fact, mass media disseminates and then legitimizes an ideological hegemony of the ruling group as common sense (Sholle & Denski, 1993).

Thus, the most efficient way of maintaining the dominant hegemonic power is to employ ideological tools to reproduce ideological legitimization of the dominant group. As a part of this tool, mass media plays the main role to distribute and reinforce the ideological hegemony of the dominant group.

One important role of ideology is to absorb individuals into the existing social order so that the development of hegemony cannot be separated from the production of ideology. “Hegemony requires that ideological assertions become self-evident cultural assumption” (Lull, 2011, p. 62). It will work when subordinated people recognize the dominant ideology as normal reality or common sense. Accordingly, “in Gramsci’s theory of Ideological hegemony, mass media are tools that ruling elites use to perpetuate their power, wealth, and status by popularizing their own philosophy, culture and morality” (Lull, 2011, p.62).

The Frankfurt School emphasizes capitalism ideology in developed societies, while some critical theorists deploy ideology for anything which oppresses some groups and dominates other such as sexism, racism, or any idea and belief which produce injustice and inequality. Kellner (2003) believes that ideology is part of a system of domination, which is used to legitimize forces and institutions that repress and oppress people and make oppression normal and moral. Thus, sexism is a kind of ideology in which women are considered in the private sphere, doing housework and be proper to care for children. To perpetuate the ideology, women’s nature is deemed as passive, domestic, submissive, and so on, whereas men are portrayed as more active, rational, and bossy (Kellner, 2003).

Besides, Kellner (2003) sees media culture as contested terrain which includes domination and resistance. He argues that media culture could be manipulative, oppressive and also be constructive and emancipative. In fact, ideological domination could be provided by contemporary media culture, which reproduces the current relationships of domination and oppression. It also can make possible empowerment, resistance, and struggle.

By reproducing domination and oppression, media culture can be a big obstacle for democratizing society when it promotes racism, sexism, ageism, classism, and other forms of prejudice. It also can be supportive of democracy and just society by providing situation and advancing the democratic project through attacking racism or sexism or weakening them and minimizing their effectiveness. It can help progress the interests of oppressed groups by representing race and gender more positively (Kellner, 2003).

However, for resisting hegemony and the manipulative force of media culture and using the media for emancipating and freedom, cultural studies advance a media pedagogy. The aim of
media pedagogy is not only to empower individuals to decode relations of power and domination in different forms of media such as television and movies but also to enable them to resist domination which is produced by the media culture and also using such platforms as the Internet to struggle against the hegemony and producing their anti-hegemonic representation (Kellner, 2011).

In fact, to be free from manipulation and domination of media culture, and also use it for struggling, media messages should be read critically and politically. It should also be analyzed in its socio-political and economic contexts and decoded to show how it promotes the interests of dominant groups or resists and struggles against hegemonic ideologies through forms of images, symbols, myths, and narrative. Critical cultural studies empower people with critical media literacy to criticize ideology such as sexism and racism in media messages and makes people question the structures of domination and develop and induce resistance and struggling for a more democratic and egalitarian society (Kellner, 2003).

Regarding the role of media in domination and oppression, the dominant group in Iran has taken over all forms of media, especially television, to distribute dominant ideologies and to legitimize domination and oppression. The rulers of the Islamic Republic of Iran see the media as an instrument with which to advance their ideology and reinforce their hegemonic position (Barraclough, 2001). Thus, by controlling the media, they disseminate their sexist ideology and patriarchal values as common sense and concrete reality. The media is a tool in the hands of Iran’s dominant group to normalize male domination and gender oppression. Considering the issue, the next part of this paper will show how Iranian national television represents gender, particularly women based on patriarchal values and how it naturalizes sexism by oppressive representation of gender in the series and advertisements.

3. Gender representation in Iranian national TV

Representations as constructed images transmit ideological meanings. They also can produce a collective cultural meaning. To continue their privilege, the dominant groups in a society definitely will control representation. They encode the world in the forms that maintain their own power and promote their status quo further in society (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1995). Consequently, oppressive and negative representations are created and employed in maintaining and legitimizing social and political inequalities and injustice. Oppressive and misrepresentation of women in the media have reproduced and perpetuated male domination and patriarchal values by portraying women as subordinate and relating gender inequalities to human genes and nature.

Since television is an ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 1971), its function is to disseminate the ideology of the governing group. Television as a mass media, which is popular and watched by the majority of people, plays a special role in strengthening the dominant ideology. Thus, in respect of gender inequality, television plays a crucial role to produce and perpetuate sexist ideology. Generating and reproducing gender roles, stereotypes, binaries, gender-based values, patriarchy, and traditional roles of men and women is an important role of television (Iyer & Luke, 2008).
In Iran, television is the most popular mass media watched by the majority of Iranians. (Baghestan & Hassan, 2009). Since Iranian National TV is controlled by the dominant group, it works as an ideological tool which has a crucial role in reproducing and legitimizing Iran’s dominant culture and ideology. Also, as the Iranian government is Islamic, it produces programs based on their interpretation of Islam. In other words, television is not an independent institution or organization, as it follows the political and ideological goals of the governing group (Azadarmaki, 2008). The dominant groups see the media such as TV as an instrument with which to advance their ideology and reinforce their hegemonic position (Barraclough, 2001).

In the following sections, some studies on gender representation in Iranian TV with emphasis on dramas and advertisements are examined. These studies help to explore how the dominant groups legitimize their sexist ideology by reproducing gender stereotypes and patriarchal values in media productions, particularly television programs and materials.

Studies on the national TV dramas demonstrate that gender roles are represented based on the traditional role of women and men. In most series, women play domestic roles. For example, in the series, Sun and Moon, Lost Love, Charmed People, and Stranger, 76.9% of the male characters have a job compared to only 34.8% of the female characters (Sadeghi & Karimi, 2007). Women are shown to work at home and as housewives and mothers whereas men work outside in economic and financial sectors. Even in the Death of a Dream and Time series educated women are portrayed playing their important role at home to care for the children and do housework (Mousavi & Kamalaldini, 2010, Ahmadi, Agili, and Mehdizadeh 2015). In the series, being mother is equated to being human and the female characters could continue living with their husbands provided they bore children (Rezaei & Afshar, 2010).

Besides, marriage is ultimate aim of all female characters in TV series Mansion of the Sun, and it is as the way that makes them happy. Being single brings a lot of difficulties for them but their marriage makes them happy regardless of any other factors that could make them happy like higher education, having a job, earning money, and so on (Khoei, 2016).

In addition, studies on the Iranian national TV series show how the programs reinforce gender stereotypes. Women in Coma, Death of a Dream are represented as submissive and rely on their husbands and are respectful of them (Chanzanagh & Haghpors, 2010; Navabakhsh & Ghomi, 2011). Similarly, women are portrayed as passive, simple-minded and imposters in the TV series, Sun and Moon, Lost Love, Charmed People, and Stranger, while men are represented as disloyal and active (Sadeghi & Karimi, 2007).

They are depicted as dependent on men, weak, poor in making decisions, and unintelligent as well. Even more in Time series, women are represented so passively that this causes problems for them not only in their personal decisions but also in taking care of children and husband (Ahmadi, Agili, and Mehdizadeh 2015). In contrast, men are portrayed as independent, influential, and intelligent in Death of a Dream and Mother’s Chants(Afshar and Rezaei 2010).
Being young also is observed as femininity for women in the series, *Sun and Moon, Lost Love, Charmed People*, and *Stranger* (Sadeghi & Karimi, 2007). They are represented as beautiful and with makeup as well in *Death of a Dream* (Mousavi & Kamalaldini, 2010).

When women are represented as fighters against their traditional roles in some Iranian national TV series, they are portrayed as negative. Studies by Navabakhsh and Ghomi (2011) on *Coma* and Chanzanagh and Haghpors (2010) on *Death of a Dream* show that women who go against the traditional values and face conflict with the traditional gender roles play the antagonists or are cast in negative roles in the dramas. They are isolated so that they will not be able to have a proper relation with others. Since their behaviors are considered as in opposition to the patriarchal beliefs and norms, they are not accepted by society and family in Iran. Furthermore, intellectual women in *Death of a Dream* exhibit immoral behavior, verbal and corporal violence more than traditional, religious women and housewives (Mousavi & Kamalaldini, 2010).

On the contrary, women who are portrayed as positive and desirable in the TV series are those who care about wearing the hijab and they are veiled. Although the women are educated, they are contented with their role as mothers and housewives. The women are portrayed as religious, ethical, traditional, submissive and relying on their husbands and respectful of them.

Although in a few cases strong women are presented, they are still depicted based on dominant patriarchal values. Delap’s (2007) analysis of the series, *Nargess*, demonstrates that although *Nargess* offers a strong female character, it shows no intention of presenting an equal gender structure where men and women have equal roles in all spheres of public and private life. It portrays women with power in the context of the family, which is based on a patriarchal framework. In fact, *Nargess* and her mother need the help of a man in difficult situations in the absence of her father. In other words, the strong female characters that can live without any male in their lives are dependent on men at crucial moments. Although the female characters are not passive, their activities and influence are mainly limited to constructing and controlling the relationships at home and with others.

Besides representing the gender roles and stereotypes, through various camera angles in the *Death of a Dream* and *Mother’s Chants*, the bright lighting and positioning are to highlight the higher position of the male characters, while dim and weak lighting is used to portray the inferior position of female characters (Rezaei & Afshar, 2010).

At the same time, analyzing many of Iran’s national TV advertisements also demonstrates that gender roles are portrayed based on the patriarchal structure. Women in most TV commercials are represented as mothers, cooks or housewives (Bahar & Hajimohammadi 2010, Ravardrad and Mohammadi 2016, Mosavi Lor and Lylian 2015, Mehdizadeh and Azarbragozaar 2016, Kianpour and Aslani 2015, Kosari, Azizi, and Azizi 2015, Azin and Tabrizi 2015). They also are shown taking care of children and husband, shopping and sewing. Study of some commercials in Iran’s national TV, women presented working outside and having jobs lesser than those of men (Asadi and Abdi 2012, Mehdizadeh and Azarbragozaar 2016). Besides, when women are presented as employees they are shown in
lower status jobs such as secretaries, while in contrast, men are presented as managers and bosses (Bahar & Hajimohammadi, 2010, Mehdizadeh and Azarbragoozaar 2016, Kianpour and Aslani 2015). In contrast to women’s role, men are portrayed as fathers who have outside jobs and are the breadwinners (Haghighinasab & Hedayati, 2005).

Along with the gender roles, most advertisements reproduce gender stereotypes in which women are depicted as passive, submissive, dependent and emotional (Hajimohammadi, 2011). On the contrary, men are presented as powerful, logical, intelligent, wise, experienced, and bossy (Bahar & Hajimohammadi, 2010).

Reviewing the studies shows that Iranian national TV reproduces and reinforce sexist ideology and women subordination. In the TV series and advertisements women are presented as passive, submissive, obedient, dependent and emotional in contrast to men who are active, pioneering, rational, anonymous, bossy and intelligent. By depicting the woman as mother, and housewife and a man as father, and holding a job outside and being the breadwinner, it legitimizes the dominant patriarchal discourse on gender division of labor in Iran. In addition, by ascribing particular tasks and behaviors to feminine or masculine genders, they are constructing men and women’s identities within the dominant patriarchal system.

Even when a career and educated woman is presented positively, it is acceptable as long as she maintains her femininity. She is a perfect woman as long as she is attractive and plays her traditional roles as a wife and a mother. Furthermore, Iranian national TV manipulates women to reject emancipated and feminist by portraying them as deprived of family, personal life, are aggressive and unsuccessful.

Additionally, the studies reveal that by presenting women as inferior and men as superior, one dominant and the other subordinate, Iranian national TV intends to normalize and maintain male domination and unjust gender relations which exist in the discriminatory laws and Iranian culture. In fact, the TV attempts to normalize the dominant sexist beliefs and patriarchal values and present them as common sense and concrete reality which cannot be challenged and questioned.

In spite of the importance of Iranian national TV programs in disseminating patriarchal values and perpetuating a sexist ideology among the people, to the best knowledge of the researcher, there have not been many studies on gender representation in the TV productions. Also, most of the studies analyzed the same series, although there are many series to choose from the large body of annual TV series produced by the various channels.

In any case, most of the studies failed to scrutinize and analyze the dressing of the women and men. There has not been any attention paid to how the dominant sexist ideology imposes its belief on women and men through the way the characters are dressed in line with the dictates of the ruling group. All women in the TV series and advertisements have to wear hijab and cover their hair and their whole body. In fact, the dominant system oppresses women by enforcing only one dress code that requires one kind of dressing for men and women which attempts to neutralize the sexist idea that men and women are innately and
naturally different. Wearing the hijab for women therefore becomes normal and is related to
the discriminatory law by which women must cover themselves appropriately.

Another significant observation of past studies is that they have failed to analyze the technical
and creative aspects of TV production including the choice of camera angles, and the effects
of color schemes, visual and audio effects, which when expertly used create specific
impressions and are subtle statements. The use of camera angles can make products appear
larger or women smaller and diminutive (Luke, 2003). A high camera angle for example,
makes the subject appear less powerful and less significant or even submissive, while a low
camera angle makes them appear more powerful, dominant.

4. Critical media literacy

According to Kellner and Share’s (2007a) classification, media literacy includes four
approaches. The first comes from fear of negative impacts of media. This perspective views
media as a tool which only misleads people and harms children and society. In this view of a
protectionist approach, media literacy can immunize people against negative effects of media.
The protectionist approach does not consider social, political, historical or economic contexts
in which media messages are produced and does not see positive and educational aspects of
media productions. They see the media as a human enemy that only produces immoral
behaviors and violence in society.

Media art education is the second approach that emphasizes the aesthetic aspect of media
productions and the dissemination of media messages. This view considers media production
as a form of self-expression without critical analysis of oppressive structures. In this approach
media literacy can help people reproduce just hegemonic representation.

The third approach is media literacy movement. This perspective views media literacy as the
ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate media messages. The media literacy
movement is criticized for its apolitical view. Through this literacy people see only the
surface of media messages without questioning ideology and issues of power which are
invisible in the messages. This view also ignores the potential of media education to
challenge oppression and strengthen democracy. Cultivation of critical consciousness and
civic participation does not matter in this approach (Thevenin, 2012a).

Kellner and Share (2007a) propose a fourth approach, a critical media literacy, which
includes aspects of the three previous approaches, but which focuses on critical analysis.
Critical media literacy employs a critical dimension that explores the structure of oppression
and domination in media messages. “Critical media literacy focuses on ideology critique and
analyzing the politics of representation of crucial dimensions of gender, race, class, and
sexuality; incorporating alternative media production; and expanding textual analysis to
include issues of social context, control, and pleasure “(Kellner & Share, 2007a:8).

Thus, critical media literacy involves analyzing representations of gender, race, ethnicity and
criticizing ideologies that are embedded in media texts. It indicates how dominant ideology
expands its beliefs and values through media messages and how these are made to appear
natural. People who are literate in media can understand its effects, and critically read the
texts. They are able to criticize and analyze codes and conventions, stereotypes, biases, dominant values and ideologies which are apparent and invisible in media content. In addition, it includes learning to produce media messages as alternatives against dominant media (Kellner & Share, 2007b).

Based on Kellner and Share (2007b), media literate people understand ideology, power, and domination in media productions so that they question relativist and apolitical ideas of media messages. In other words, critical media literacy challenges the prevalent view that media messages are neutral and apolitical (Kellner & Share, 2009). By learning media literacy, individuals can perceive that media productions are biased and support some political view and ideology, although this ideological orientation may be hidden and audiences are not aware of it.

In this view, media messages are not constructed in a vacuum, but are produced in a given political-social structure which brings particular values, norms and meanings to media messages, then media messages as analyzed as products of social production In this regard, by understanding media effects within the social and historical contexts, issues of representation and ideology are more constructive for investigating the interconnections between media and society, information and power (Ferguson, 2004).

Thus, critical media literacy can equip people to become free from being submissive and oppressed. It provides a framework and tool so that individuals can dissect the instruments of cultural domination (Kellner, 2000). In this way, not only does it free citizens from being objective and passive but also they will be subjective and active in constructing their identity and effect social transformation. By learning critical media literacy people and marginalized groups understand how media works as a tool in the hands of dominant groups to control and subordinate them. Then they try to change from being objective and passive in facing media culture and attempt to struggle against subordination and oppression. In fact, media literacy makes people sophisticated citizens rather than sophisticated consumers (Lewis & Jhally, 1998).

As Kellner (2003) states, critical media pedagogy can make people skillful and knowledgeable about discriminating messages, values, and ideologies embedded in media texts. It helps citizens to recognize how media culture transfers oppressive representations of class, race, and gender. Furthermore, by critical examination of media messages, citizens understand how the representation influences thought and behavior. Through this recognition and comprehension, they will be competent enough to develop critical distance from the works of media culture and thus gain power over their culture. The framework and abilities lead people to challenge the structure and organization of society and it provokes citizens to join and participate in struggling for social transformation.

5. Critical media literacy and Iranian women

Critical media literacy as discussed earlier focuses on criticizing ideology and the politics of representation in media productions. In relation to gender it questions sexist ideology and politics of gender representation in media messages. It examines how the representation is constructed by dominant groups and structure.
By learning critical media literacy women as an oppressed group understand how dominant
groups use media to perpetuate gender stereotypes and make them natural. The literacy can
help women to discern codes, conventions which make gender stereotypes and representation
unquestionable and as concrete reality.

By reading media messages critically, women identify how media culture can construct
gender identity and how it makes the given identity normal and the only way to be women
and men. They understand that the represented femininity is not inborn and is constructed by
dominant patriarchal system and society. They discern common sense assumptions about
femininity and masculinity and how the media reproduce the dominant group’s sexist values
as common senses.

Critical media literacy makes women sophisticated to analyze gender stereotypes. Then they
become skeptical about behaviors and norms that are considered typical for women. It makes
women able to understand how the patriarchal system reproduces domination and gender
oppression in a society by representing and reshaping gender stereotypes through media
productions. In fact, developing critical media literacy assists citizens particularly women in
realizing how media culture can perpetuate sexism and also stimulate them to question
gender discrimination and oppression in a given society.

According to Luke and Iyer (2008) critical media literacy makes people suspicious of
particular representations of gender as well as the social accuracy and source of gender
representation. It questions whose version of gender stereotypes is represented and how these
are promoted. It also includes a critical understanding of social and cultural constructions of
women and men, girls and boys, and gender relations.

In Iran, on the one hand, women have been deprived of many of their basic rights and have
suffered from sexist ideologies and patriarchy that consider women as irrational, immature,
and different forms of discriminatory policies that affect their lives from birth to death
(Mohammadi, 2007). On the other hand, by considering gender representation in Iranian
national TV, the dominant group and patriarchal system reproduce its sexist ideology through
mainstream media particularly television. In fact, the culture of national TV works as a form
of pedagogy that teaches women gender roles, values and beliefs on how to behave as good
and acceptable women according to dominant gender ideology. It attempts to shape and
constructs the femininity of Iranian women along the lines of the dominant sexist ideology.
Indeed, it is a tool which facilitates the internalizing of male domination by Iranian women
and justifies gender discrimination.

Since gender representations in Iran’s national TV provide resources to construct the images
of Iranian women and men and their femininity and masculinity, critical analysis of the
representation makes the structure of gender representations comprehensible and how
negative and oppressive representations promotes subordination and make it look natural.

By deploying critical media literacy in the context of Iran’s society and its gender oppressive
structure, Iranian women deeply perceive the structure of domination and repression. It helps
them to comprehend how the system perpetuates and legitimizes the inequality and
discriminative laws by oppressive representation of women as irrational and immature. They
recognize how gender representation politics in Iran’s national TV have a strong relation with discriminatory gender politics in reality.

In addition, by critical analysis of Iran’s national TV programs, Iranian women discern that representing them as passive, dependent, mothers, housewives in contrast to men as active, independent, wise and intelligent is not only for entertainment. But the TV series and advertisements intend to normalize and naturalize the behaviors and stereotypes to legitimize discriminatory laws and politics in Iranian society.

In fact, critical media literacy helps them to perceive that the oppressive representation target is to confirm the sexist politics of Iran’s political system by originating the gender inequality in natural and biological differences between man and women. In other words, they perceive that “media texts never simply mirror or reflect ‘reality’, but instead construct hegemonic definitions of what should be accepted as reality” (Carter & Steiner, 2003, p. 21).

Critical analysis of Iran’s national TV commercials makes clear for Iranian women that the TV advertisements are not just for selling and advertising the goods, but they are also for reinforcing dominant gender ideology. They discern the commercials are organized to gain profit and power by reproducing male domination.

Iran’s national TV as a mass media makes the women accept and justify male domination and misrecognize forms of gender oppression experienced in everyday life. It prevents Iranian women from being able to understand the structure of gender subordination. It can lead Iranian women to be submissive, non-critical and not query gender discrimination inequalities that they experience in society.

As for the oppressive role of the national TV programs, critical media literacy could enhance their critical consciousness, which helps Iranian women to recognize the structure of gender oppression and transform this situation to be less oppressive. By developing critical consciousness, the women understand social, political and cultural contexts of Iranian media, in particular, TV and its role in the society. It could empower Iranian women to understand the role of the media such as Iran’s national TV as a social institution which could construct gender identities. Indeed, raising critical consciousness not only helps them to recognize and understand oppression but also encourages them to struggle against gender discrimination.

Thus, Iranian women not only could challenge the oppressive role of Iran national TV in internalizing subjugation but also they could also gain power and skills to use available media resources to construct their own oppositional identity and representation. They can employ alternative media to struggle against the oppressive representation and gender discrimination in Iranian society.

In this way, critical media literacy can empower Iranian women and give them the knowledge to understand how the media works as instruments of cultural domination in the hands of the Iranian political system. Then, they would not continue to passively accept the oppressive media culture. It could induce the women to be active and critical against the manipulation and domination (Kellner, 2000). This would stimulate Iranian women and enable them to participate in social life. In fact, it makes them subjects in the process of deconstructing
injustices, expressing their own voices, and struggling to create a just society (Garcia et al., 2013). Critical media education would encourage the development of critical consciousness and engagement in transformative politics (Thevenin, 2012b).

In sum, by employing Kellner and Share’s (2005) view for Iranian society and equipping Iranian women with critical media literacy, it would give them power over Iran’s gendered media culture, so they will be able to expose the myths, codes, values and gender stereotypes in Iranian media productions such as Iranian state television programs. Thus, they will be able to challenge the dominant sexist ideology, create their own oppositional meaning and identities, and shape and transform the social conditions of Iranian dominant patriarchal culture and society.

6. Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, Iran’s national TV reproduces and reinforces gender stereotypes, patriarchal values and ideas which socialize women into the traditional values and roles. This makes Iranian women accept unjust rights and laws as a result of their natural essence and genes. Then, they conform to patriarchal values and the sexist ideology of Iran’s dominant group. In this way, gender oppression would seem just and fair so that Iranian women not only accept male domination, but also internalize patriarchal values and strive to adopt them. Even when some women are against the patriarchal values and male domination, they look abnormal and are rejected by society.

The oppressive role of the TV productions makes critical media literacy crucial for women in Iran. It helps them to understand domination and will help spur them to take action against gender oppression. Being critically literate in media could empower Iranian women to perceive the role of media particularly that of Iran’s national TV. They will be able to see that the TV programs are not only for entertainment and information and could consider the media as a social institution in which the oppressive system is employed to legitimize and naturalize male domination.

Therefore, critical media literacy helps Iranian women recognize how the national TV series and advertisements by representing women as passive and active, emotional and rational, doing housework and men as strong, active and working outside perpetuates gender discrimination and makes it natural and normal.

Additionally, critical pedagogy of media raises Iranian women’s critical consciousness by which they could distinguish the oppressive role of media in Iran’s social, political, and economic structure. They will also be able to realize that the role of Iran’s national TV productions in constructing their identities is based on the dominant sexist ideology. In fact, they will be able to see that the mass media is an ideological apparatus in the hands of the governing group to perpetuate and legitimize its oppressive gender politics. Besides, raising critical consciousness will not only help Iranian women to become aware of the socio-political context of the national TV messages but will also empower them to take action against gender oppression by rejecting hegemonic identity and constructing their oppositional identity. In fact, Iranian women will learn how they could use limited and different media resources such as the Internet and social networks to produce oppositional
media messages to express their voice and struggle against gender oppression individually and collectively.

For achieving a robust and egalitarian democracy, Iranian women as an oppressed group need to understand the invisible structure of all forms of oppression. Critical media literacy could give them the awareness and also power over the elements of gender oppression in their culture and society. In fact, it would enable them to resist oppression and create their own representation and identity, struggle against gender subordination and transform the unjust condition of Iranian culture and society into a less oppressive society.

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