

Gender Identities and Media

Categories of identity, such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and nationality have been the subject of investigation by scholars in the last few decades. Of all these identity markers, gender is perhaps the most problematic and the one that has generated the most controversy. While scholars tend to find coherence or connections in these identities – for example, minoritized peoples based on racial and ethnic identities tend to be marginalized based on religion and class as well – it has been relatively easy to view such categories as discrete. Gender, however, has not been so neat a category as it crosses, permeates, and complicates other identities. Indeed, it is the identity that pervades all others.

In media studies, critics have been concerned not only with the premise that differences in identities, or what cultures seem to view as differences, have been instruments of oppressive power and subjugation. They have also scrutinized the part the media have played in the creation and perpetuation of identities that support a traditional social arrangement. But while they may have been instrumental in promoting traditional gender categories and in discouraging change in gender relations, the media have also created space for alternative notions of gender as well as other alternative ideas that question the status quo. Deeply-rooted identities and relations of power have not been shattered, but the media today are arenas of discordant voices where contradictory “truths” about gender and identity fight for space in the pull and push for social change. A resolution does not appear to be imminent, but the very existence of such conflict suggests possibilities for a more open negotiation of meanings of gender and identity.

It is with this optimism that the University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication presents the second issue of *Plaridel*. This issue assembles a selection of articles, an investigative report, an interview, and reviews that critique, reflect on, chide, and celebrate the diverse gender constructions and reconstructions in media today, as

well as in some decades-old media. The papers cover a broad range of topics and theoretical positions exposing a spectrum of media texts that contribute to the ongoing transformation of our sense of identity.

Speaking of media texts from what may feel like the distant past, Cynthia Luz P. Rivera's essay on Filipino women's magazines published during the American colonial occupation (1909-1940) notes the mood of resistance and cultural subversion in the magazine articles written by Filipino women of the period. Rivera's observation and Genoveva Edroza-Matute's half-a-century-old radio scripts provide evidence that earlier texts have not always been a force for the status quo. Elizabeth L. Enriquez's interview of Matute sharpens the otherwise subtle rebellion against patriarchy of the latter's radio soap opera scripts.

More recent texts have not all been equally or more progressive. Television talk shows hosted by women do not necessarily promote women's empowerment. This is the conclusion of Josefina M.C. Santos in her comparative review of ABS-CBN's *Morning Girls* and GMA's *Sis*, two competing morning TV programs aired on the same time slot. Elyrah L. Salanga shows how the narrative structure of advertisements of Surf, a popular brand of laundry soap, contributes to the regimentation of the Filipino housewife amid diverse images of woman in the same series of ads. Danilo A. Arao's investigative report on the controversy surrounding another ad series – billboard ads of Napoleon Quincé brandy – critiques blatant sexism in liquor advertisements. However, the report also illustrates how feminist outrage provoked by the ad – as well as violent reactions from rather conservative groups – can force a recall of an ad and an adjustment in the content of a subsequent ad.

Scholars coming from different standpoints have argued about the constructions of woman in soap operas in radio and television. While some insist that the images continue to be largely traditional, others find liberative elements in the very same images. A recent sub-genre of soap operas, the *Chinovelas* – so-called because they are canned soaps imported from Taiwan, the label being a takeoff from Mexican *telenovelas* – has swept local television. What sets it apart is its appeal to teenagers and the relatively young, a market segment that departs from the traditional, older audiences of soaps. However, Marlon James S.

Sales found that *Meteor Garden*'s images of gender and gender relations remain traditional, even as the soap speaks to its young audience in a way that allows them to deal with their own reading and negotiation of gender identities.

Sarah Jane S. Raymundo, on the other hand, produces her own sharp reading of gender reconstruction as well as reinforcement as she calls attention to capitalist pressures on cultural production, particularly that of popular romance novels – the *Rosas* series – that attempt a feminist re-imaging of women. This pressure prevents a corresponding feminist reconstruction of men and allows masculine domination to endure as the novels' author, Joi Barrios, is constrained to adopt a formula of fictional male identities.

Protest against the marginalization of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders (LGBT) has been the impetus for the creation of virtual gay communities on the internet. Fernando A. Austria, Jr. writes that such communities are alternatives to mainstream media that continue to discriminate against the LGBT category. Perhaps other alternatives are emerging as television and film grow bolder in presenting images of the LGBT that are not stereotypes. One such film is *Eating Out*, directed by Q. Allan Brocka. Reviewed by Angelo Ma. Antonio L. Morales, the film uses humor and satire to propose that there are less differences between gays and the “ordinary” man or woman than the mainstream media tend to suggest.

Living up to the promise made by the chair of the editorial board in the first issue of *Plaridel* to feature reviews of media materials and documents and texts related to the media, this issue includes Paz H. Diaz's evaluation of the latest publication of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, *The Rulemakers: How the Wealthy and Well-born Dominate Congress* by Sheila S. Coronel, Yvonne T. Chua, Luz Rimban, and Booma R. Cruz. Diaz maintains the book is a must-read for all journalists and students of journalism and Philippine studies. The issue also provides important research materials to students of film and television: The latest Implementing Rules and Regulations, with the newest amendments, now being used by the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board (MTRCB). Finally, Violeda A. Umali painstakingly condenses the research results and conclusions

of selected theses and dissertations produced in 2001 by undergraduate and graduate students of the UP CMC.

This issue of *Plaridel* covers as wide a range as possible of gender issues as they intersect with the media. However, it is obvious that a single issue cannot include the whole gamut of subjects on gender and media, and capture the entire continuum of fluid identities that think through their sense of self through, among other modes of expression, the media. As we are on the subject of modes of expression, the editorial board is very pleased to note that this issue celebrates two firsts: a bilingual collection of papers and a section on investigative reports. The inclusion of papers written in Filipino is an acknowledgment of the position of the editorial board that Filipino scholars do not always write for the benefit of an international readership. There are times when Filipino scholars and critics feel the need to address fellow Filipinos in a language that they feel best expresses what are viewed as local issues. The investigative report section, on the other hand, is proof that a journalistic output can be both readable and scholarly, and that a well-researched manuscript need not be esoteric.


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