

## **The Portrayal of Men and Women in the Media: Perpetuating Gender Stereotypes?**

If we assume that the media perpetuates stereotypes, what can be done to combat them, or has our society become numb to these stereotypes? What do the media messages say about men and women in society?

The notion of stereotypes is quite complex. Stereotypes act like codes that give audiences a quick, common understanding of a person or group of people. The media not only entertains and offers news to its users, but also transfers the stereotypes, beliefs and values of society. In relation to gender, media generally portray women as caring, nurturing and as sexual objects, while men are portrayed in roles of decision-making and as machos.

Stereotypes can be problematic because they can:

- reduce a wide range of differences in people to simplistic categorizations;
- transform assumptions about particular groups of people into “realities”;
- be used to justify the position of those in power;
- perpetuate social prejudice and inequality.

It is very important that people are able to recognise these stereotypes. All those involved in media have a huge responsibility – that of eliminating any media representations which encourage discrimination and degradation on the basis of gender. The portrayal, reporting and representation of men and women in the media should respect their dignity and promote equal opportunities. Men and women should be portrayed in a wide range of roles, both traditional and non-traditional, in paid work, social, family and leisure activities.

Striving to eliminate sex-role stereotyping is a dire need for the media. To this end, media are encouraged to refrain from presenting women as inferior beings and exploiting them as sexual objects. Therefore, the media should not over emphasise certain roles of women mainly the domestic and sexual role and portray them as submissive.

Stereotypes in the media may be imposed by sexist language. This type of language reflects the idea that one sex is superior to the other and therefore contributes to the oppression of one of the sexes to the detriment of the other. Gender sensitive language is encouraged to be used.

Promoting of diverse and balanced images of women and men in media determines the future roles in society of the young generation. Media education and further awareness raising contribute to encouraging audiences to discern media content and to distinguish gender stereotypes. This is fundamental to continue challenging gender stereotypes and to empower



men and women to participate in all social and economic spheres and not to assume sexist and stereotypical roles as portrayed by the media.

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) offers training sessions on issues related to equality, including on gender stereotypes. NCPE can be contacted on 2590 3850 or [equality@gov.mt](mailto:equality@gov.mt)