

It's Time to Pick a Side: Why Remaining Neutral towards Media Representations of Women Isn't Working

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Media portrayals of women are often negative, and can have dire effects on female viewers, yet our society continues to allow these types of images. The American conception of free speech is what drives us to tolerate these images. In America, media representations are protected under the highly valued right to free speech. The general belief is that, in order to ensure the right to free speech for all, the law must remain neutral towards the content of speech, avoiding judgments on whether that content is good or bad. As a result, harmful representations of women remain in the public domain because producers are deemed to have the right to free speech. I would argue, though, that media representations of women extend beyond questions of "good" or "bad" to questions of right or wrong; beyond questions of mere opinion or preference to questions of justice. Ultimately, harmful media representations oppress women, a hard truth that is masked by our neutral stance towards free speech. Thus, to truly ensure women the same rights as men, we may have to abandon our current conception of justice, which promotes a kind of false, gender-biased "neutrality" in dealing with speech, for a different conception of justice: true freedom and equality for all.

Information about the Author:

Jane Hurdish is a social work major who is interested in social justice and advocating for vulnerable populations, including women. She has become particularly interested in how women fit into our society. Of course, one aspect of this is understanding how women are portrayed in the media and what this means for them and society.

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