

How the news media both shadows and magnifies feminism

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2014/07/28/how-the-news-media-both-shadows-and-magnifies-feminism/

2014-7-28

When Laura Bates from #Everydaysexism gave her presentation at LSE Polis Summer School, I felt so 'echoed'. Those obscene sexual harassments, both visible and invisible, have happened to me and my friends in various forms.

This article by Polis Summer School student Yinan Che.

At the time we felt disgusted and helpless. We raged about it together and then several days later, we forgot, until similar things happened again. We never write these experiences down, nor do we call the police or spread the stories to peers. As women, sexism is so close, yet we never think of any self-defensive methods.

To a certain extent I am a victim of sexism myself, but I don't want to be a "Utopian feminist". In a way the word "feminism" has somehow turned into a "frightening fringe element". I think of radical feminists lobbying and fighting for their rights and those ugly words about sex and rape. Probably my bias is partly because of the way media has portrayed women and feminism.

In her talk Bates' said:

"There is nothing innocent about sexualized representations of women; they are a part of the operation of power which trivializes women's perspectives and keeps them 'in their place'."

A UN reports says that, "women must be involved as political leaders; parliamentarians; judges; police officers; influencers in NGOs, global organizations, and civil society; though-leaders in academia; CEO and Senior Managers; Negotiators in trade unions and employers' organizations; decision-makers at home".

I interpret that aim as emphasizing women's presence in every single occupation and women's responsibility in every domain, not to suggest women's superiority to men.

Women's equal participation in decision-making is a question of justice and democracy. It is also important to reflect everybody's needs.

But when talking about feminism, the news media always struggles to find a balance in the portrayal of women. On the one hand it says that women are equal. But it also says 'we get to police your sexuality'. We choose what is sexually pleasing, what is provocative, where the lines lie and when they are blurred. When you're airbrushed and squeezed into a Wonderbra on a billboard in a train station, you're within our boundaries. When you're drunk or sexually aggressive or blase or, God forbid, a combination of all of these, then you're outside. You're a disgrace to yourself, your father and your country.

The stereotyped characterisation of women puts them into a subordinate position. On the other hand they are given more profile as objects of beauty and told they are powerful. It a kind of dilemma of equal rights and special treatment. Media uses feminism and advocates feminism in a reciprocal and contradictory process.

This article by Polis Summer School student Yinan Che.

- Copyright © 2014 London School of Economics and Political Science

