Review Article

Influence of the Thai Mass Media on Violence Against Women: Synthesis of Research Studies

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ABSTRACT

Since its beginning, feminism has studied the relationship between men and women which is based on sexual inequality. It indicated that the needs of men to dominate women has led to the present sexual violence. Many studies have shown the increasing role of the media in perpetuating and promoting violence against women through their representation of women and coverage of issues. Of the many influences on how women are viewed, the mass media are the most pervasive and one of the most powerful. All forms of mass media communicate images of the sexes and various types of violence against women. This study analyzed research on violence against women in mass media issues in the 20-year period from 1990 to 2010 in Thailand. The author reviews and synthesizes the key findings of the influence of mass media on violence against women in Thailand. Finally, the implications of these findings for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Thai mass media, violence against women

บทคัดย่อ

นับจากอดีตถึงปัจจุบัน ตามแนวคิดสตรีนิยม ให้ความสนใจศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างชายหญิง ที่มาจากฐานความคิดเรื่องความไม่เท่าเทียมกันทาง เพศ และชี้ว่าความไม่เท่าเทียมกันดังกล่าวที่นำไปสู่ ปัญหาความรุนแรงทางเพศในปัจจุบันนั้นเกิดจาก ความต้องการครอบงำเพศหญิงของเพศชาย ปรากฏ งานศึกษาวิจัยจำนวนมากที่ชี้ให้เห็นบทบาทของ สื่อมวลชนที่มีต่อการส่งเสริมความรุนแรงต่อผู้หญิง อย่างต่อเนื่องผ่านการนำเสนอภาพตัวแทน และผ่าน เนื้อหาที่ปรากฏในสื่อ จึงนับได้ว่า สื่อมวลชนมี อิทธิพลอย่างกว้างขวางและแพร่หลายในการสร้างภาพ ตัวแทนให้แก่ผู้หญิง สื่อจำนวนมากอาศัยรูปแบบ ต่าง ๆ ในการนำเสนอภาพผู้หญิงที่สะท้อนเรื่องเพศ และนำเสนอเนื้อหาความรุนแรงต่อผู้หญิง บทความนี้ มุ่งวิเคราะห์งานวิจัยที่ว่าด้วยความรุนแรงต่อผู้หญิงใน สื่อมวลชนไทยในช่วง 20 ปีที่ผ่านมา (พ.ศ. 2533– 2553) ผู้เขียนทบทวนและสังเคราะห์ข้อค้นพบ เกี่ยวกับอิทธิพลของสื่อมวลชนที่มีต่อความรุนแรง ของผู้หญิง และท้ายที่สุด บทความนี้ ได้ชี้ให้เห็นการ ประยุกต์ผลที่ได้จากการวิจัยดังกล่าวสำหรับการวิจัย ในอนาคต

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INTRODUCTION

Feminist researchers have been interested in studying sexual inequality and have indicated that sexual inequality comes from men's domination of women. This concept is called patriarchy, implemented almost at the same time as the beginning of urbanization. The patriarchal system is the power of men in society, ideology, family, and the political system in which they either use the power to oppress directly or through worship, law, language, custom, idioms, education as well as the division of labor in which women are always lower in status (Josiah, 2002). Josiah also stated that patriarchy is the system whereby men use the law, culture and religion to give them the confidence that they have more power than women. Therefore, they use violence because women are lower in status and they need women to be lower in status. This is consistent with Tantasombat (2005) who referred to Mary O'Brien's article on "The Politics of Reproduction" which defined women's power in terms of men's need to overcome their sense of alienation caused by women's fertility whereby women give birth and raise children.

Mohanty (1988) pointed out that patriarchy was formulated by the interaction of various factors including the history of colonization, nationalism, armed conflict, and migration. It is also represented by economic status, social organization, nationality, level, age, handicap, region, culture, and other things. Those factors caused sexual inequality which turned out to be a part of men and women's relationship system later.

Patriarchy has created inequities in economics, politics, and society. It has controlled the mechanisms of social organization, the thinking system, the value system, culture through traditions, worship, law, and legal policies. Sexual bias has created inequality and inadequate access to health care and therapy as well as affected women's perceptions; for example, the lack of health knowledge, a physical attitude which emphasized beauty, youth, shape, sexuality, sexual exploitation, pornography, and the image of women (Somsawas, 2006). Thus, the important effect of patriarchy that academics studying feminism want to discuss is violence against women.

Violence against women: Reflection of patriarchy

Violence against women is the main issue that feminist academia focuses on, due to fact that violence always leads to inequalities between men and women. Josiah (2002) reported that violence against women is the outstanding issue for the worldwide movement of women's organizations at the grassroots level. They have focused on adding more equality and rights awareness among themselves. Therefore, many organizations have become interested in the fact that violence against women has its foundation in patriarchy. Josiah (2002) reported that in the unequal relationships between men and women, violence is a tool used by men to control and oppress women.

Definition of types of violence against women

Bogard (1988) divided violence against women into two levels: personal violence and structural violence. Personal violence is visible in actions such as physical battering, rape, or sexual harassment. Structural violence is invisible but engrained in the social structure and related through norms, thoughts, and beliefs, and is then blended and transferred to other generations through the socialization patterns, such as the values of men's and women's roles, women's images, the role of the wife etc., and automatically affects the anticipation of violence of receivers.

The United Nations is interested in the concept of violence against women as a pattern of discrimination and human rights threats to women though its declaration on the elimination of violence against women at the United Nations General Assembly on December 20, 1993 (United Nations General Assembly, 2006). The declaration summarized concerns that violence against women

will be a barrier to fulfill humanity's goals of equality, development, and peace. Violence is also a violation of the rights and fundamental freedoms of women according to Browne (1993). He noted that violence against women is a phenomenon of the basic power relationship between men and women which is unequal. This phenomenon causes further domination by men and discrimination against women and has interrupted women's improvement. It is also clear that violence against women is one of the savage social mechanisms that affect women's status making them inferior to men (Browne, 1993).

The above declaration defined violence against women to mean any action of sexual violence which may physically, sexually, or mentally hurt or offend women. This includes by threat and deprivation both publicly and in personal life. Therefore, definitions of violence against women include: 1) physical, sexual, or mental violence within the family which includes battery, sexual abuse of girls, rape by the spouse, female genital circumcision, and traditional rules that disadvantage women; 2) violence which is not by a spouse but takes advantage of women as shown in murder, rape, trafficking in women and girls, and sexual harassment in workplaces or schools physical, sexual, and mental violence within the community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, threat in the workplace, school, or other places, and forced prostitution; 3) in addition, ignorance of the state of these forms of violence counts as violence as well (United Nations General Assembly, 2006).

United Nations research divided the forms of violence against women into four types (United Nations General Assembly, 2006). 1) Violence against women within the family includes physical assault either by force or weapons, rape by a husband of his own wife, verbal threats or hurt, as well as improper treatment and blocking women's access to basic resources. Maynard (1993) said that the study of violence against women in the family must be very careful because particular societies and cultures have their own approaches to managing

violence within the family. 2) Violence against women within the community, includes physical and mental violence in the workplace or in public, in the form of rape, murder, sexual harassment either verbal or mental, and trafficking. 3) Violence against women perpetrated or condoned by the state, entails not accepting the notification of or ignoring violence against women within a family, and investigating rape without protecting or considering human rights. 4) Violence against women in armed conflict, such as in ancient times or during war, when women may be sent to fight, be raped, or used as slaves to the soldiers or the winning party.

In the past two decades, there have been many research studies about violence against women, named variously as violence against women, sexual violence, and gender violence. The key to any study is to set the appropriate topic, reflect the right message, propose a definition of violence, and follow the direction of feminism (Radford, Friedberg, & Harne, 2000). The research has emphasized the definition of violence against women and also considered violence against children. It has also focused on domestic violence, sexual harassment, pornography, and sexual abuse of children (Radford et al., 2000).

Reflection of patriarchy from the third wave of feminism

Feminism has been in continuous development since its beginning. Feminism may be divided into many schools: the first, second and third waves of feminism. The third wave of feminism began in 1980 and continues to the present. It focuses on the importance of differences between men and women, which has brought up many issues such as sexual diversity, identity, skin color, homosexuality etc. The main issue of third wave feminism has been sexual violence and the need to eliminate any violence which results from sexual inequality (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006). Krolokke and Sorensen tried to define "femininity" which is the universal female identity. They also tried to

change the stereotype of women as well as the image and language which is used about women in the media. Postmodern feminism believes that language is an important tool to set the frame and build the social truth about women, while the cultural mechanism is the tool to set femininity through language (Peet & Hartwick, 2009).

The important school for the third wave of feminism is postmodern feminism. The keywords for study by this school are "language", "discourse", and "power" (Holmes & Meredith, 2010). Postmodern feminism explains that power is about benefit and how it is used by a particular group, in a particular context and situation. Power will generate the reaction and not tie in with any group. Foucault, who was one of the important theorists in this group, saw that identity as indefinite. The important writing of Foucault, "History of Sexuality", mentioned that power is everywhere, in every interaction, is diverse, and is organized under various principles, not a single one (Woodhill, 1988). In reference to Foucault's concept of power, Martin (1988) mentioned that discourse about sex is the main focus for power control. Women are targeted to be watched, dominated, and controlled. Women's strength will grow when they get themselves out of a discourse domination situation or create a mechanism for desexualization. Physical gender is also one of the determinants that causes women to be subjugated to men according to sex in areas of both control and freedom. So, the struggle must not lead every social situation to focus on the sex issue and remain unrelated to sexual identity. One of the famous theorists in postmodern feminism was Judith Butler. Her most popular writing was "Gender Trouble" which reviewed the concepts of the third wave feminists and pointed out the difference between gender, which is set by society, and sex, which is set physically. It questioned why sex is accepted as the determinant for men or women in society. (Butler, 1995)

As part of the third wave of feminism, academia has questioned the role and influence of the mass media; whether it was the key to transmit patriarchy via various media to the receivers (Woodhill, 1988). If media has an influence on knowledge, thought, and expression of violence against women, it has led to the sexual inequality problem and the mentioned violence continuing in society. Therefore, a group of academic journalists proposed the feminist media theory which emphasized the role and influence of the media in presenting the power relationships which led to the threat of inequality between men and women. These are discussed in the next section.

Thai mass media and a transmission of patriarchy in feminist media theory

Pipithkul (2005) explained that the feminist media theory as a reflection of women in the media was out of date and affected women's external and internal visions. Women took those pictures into their brains and allowed them to dictate their lives especially the relations between men and women. The pictures of women in the media not only affected the domination of women's thought and personal way of life but also affected men's thought, which framed the women in similar visions. This circle of thought created the stereotype. These situations provoked additional study by academics studying feminism in the media discussed later who were interested to find out what the concept was behind the presentation, and how to disclose and to revoke that concept. Those images presented via the media as a socializing agent may have a powerful effect on the attitudes, values, thoughts, and behavior of people in society (Somsawas, 2006).

In Thailand, there have been many research studies that are discussed later about violence against women via the mass media based on postmodern feminism. They studied the discourse of sex and violence against women in Thai society based on beliefs that language was the agent to transmit the thinking system, values, and culture as sexual inequality in the social structure. Language was used as a regulator to drive some thought and

expression and may hide the thought and expression at the same time. Boonmongkol, Chonwilai, Lapimol and Samakeekarom (2008) found that the discourse about mainstream sex dominated the thinking system and the practices of sex for the people in society through various methods including: the production of knowledge about the truth of sex, creating and reproducing the value of sex which refers to morality, and controlling by religious rules and laws. Hence, the discourse about mainstream sex was not isolated but it was a part of the knowledge bonding and the reproduction, transmission, and establishing of the truth of sex through social mechanisms and people related to the production and use of that knowledge.

Objectives of the review

This literature review is intended to find out the influence of the Thai mass media toward the transmission of violence against women. The review aims to synthesize the findings from published and unpublished literature on the relevant aspects of violence against women in the mass media.

METHODOLOGY

This documentary analysis covers research papers and dissertations from 1990 to 2010. The relevant research papers were reviewed and analyzed using qualitative data analysis methods. The content was analyzed and the essence of the research was synthesized by applying research to the concepts of violence against women and on influence of the mass media as the framework. The results reveal that most of the existing research papers are quantitative and repetitive studies on the mass media influence and the factors contributing to occurrences of violence against women.

FINDINGS

According to McQuail (2010), mass media can be defined as the media used for directing or transmitting to the masses. The mass media is used by the masses to get news and current information, for entertainment, and for communicating with other people. There are many types of mass media including the publishing or print media (newspapers, magazines), the broadcasting media (television, radio, cable television), film and digital media (the Internet).

Many research studies have pointed out the role of the media in publicizing violence against women through feature articles. Women have been presented as victims of violence or as sexual objects through the media (Hansawasdi, 2001; Jeenjaroen, 2001; Maison, 2001; Ratsaranuwat, 2001; Saejung, 2001) consistent with the research overviews of the mass media in Thailand, which also reported the same findings (Kaewthep & Pipithkul, 1996). The feminist media theory states that the language operation and media discourse have very high impacts in the portrayal of sexual violence through cultural productions, stereotypes, and presentations (Hoare & Smith, 1971; Tuchman, 1978; Kaewthep & Pipithkul, 1996; Chaemsanit, 2008)

Gender stereotype

In the early days of feminism and media studies, academics were interested in studying gender stereotypes. Tuchman (1978) found that the media did not reflect the actual changes in relationships between sex and the fact that many women were not just housewives but workers in society. The results of these distorted presentations and productions affected girls in that they could not find women who could be role models in any aspect other than the same role that they used to see in daily life. Therefore, Tuchman proposed that the anticipated changes in the media were presenting a reflection more than an established truth still existing in the changed society.

The female stereotype has been displayed continuously in the Thai mass media. A survey reported that in 1988 women represented only the beauty image without a specific role (United

Nations General Assembly, 2006). Women had an important role only as housewives. Images of women were weak and below those used for men. Fewer women producers were in the mass media and there were many problems in the workplace similar to those of women working in other industries. The problem with those image presentations in the media was that the purpose of presentation was the pursuit of their own business benefit more than the objectives of education and human resource development. The National Women's Council study believed that the presentation of individuals in traditional ways, either in news, movies, or series would gain better audience approval. As Chaemsanit (2008) found in a critique on sex in the media, emphasis was placed on female images, such as presenting women as sexual objects, sexy actresses in public displays, and in TV series which presented only drama and not intellectual enrichment.

Cultural reproduction

The cultural reproduction concept is about the transmission of culture, values, and norms from generation to generation. It is also the mechanism for cultural continuity to remain strong as time passes. Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist, discussed cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977). He presented the concept of cultural reproduction and focused on capitalism, field of work, and behavior or personal capital (habitus). He claimed that cultural reproduction in every society was transmitted from generation to generation through various social channels in order to maintain capital in the society, such as through the education system as well as various branches of the arts.

Research reported by Hansawasdi (2001) supported the role of the mass media in cultural reproduction, as the research found that all movies presented Thai female images in the same style, which was idealistic. That process was formulated from the main concept about women as elite or high class people, either formal or informal. That concept

has predominated and is used to define the main function of females in Thai society. Women in the movies have proceeded through the norm of conformity. The normalizing judgment has been used as a tool for the concept that any abnormal matters must be made normal. Hence, the people, especially women, would accept the women's images in the movies. All these processes were factors which affected women's idealistic images, which became the main conceptualizations in Thai society of femininity and were reproduced continuously.

Representative image

Stuart Hall was a theorist who described the representative image (Hall, 1997). He explained that a representative image meant to the people or group whatever that representative image portrayed, consistent with the thoughts, beliefs, or norms which existed in the society. Representative images have been presented via existing codes and symbols and society will recognize the meaning as a truth of society. It is consistent with the domination theory of Gramsci (Hoare & Smith, 1971) which explained that the people or group who have more power in society will try to build acceptance and will control the poor people or an outsider group without physical violence but rather by using the media to create a thought domination situation. A person's identity can be built through the media.

From the media's role in violence against women, Kaewthep, Louiyapong and Komolbutr (2005), who studied the image of women in the Thai mass media, found interesting points in various media content: it always included the domestic ideology, i.e., specifying that the place for women is the home and women always rely on and need the protection from men, while women were considered as sexual objects for men. Kaewthep et al. (2005) stated that now women are working outside the home but the media still reflects only the middle class of working women who are successful in their careers without reflecting all working women. It

always represents some meaning of working women who are included as an unimportant factor or in a minor role when compared to men.

The women represented not only appeared to be from the higher status of working women but also reflected the attitude towards women's external image. Maison (2001) studied the representative elements from the concept to define the meaning by women's physical shape. She also found power negotiation factors between women and the mass media in the political sense regarding negotiation on how the body is presented in Thai magazines: the presentation has been coded and negotiated by women themselves. It was in line with the negotiation concept in setting a representation which reversed the stereotype and substituted a positive image for a negative one and retained the stereotype but changed the meaning. The element of negotiation in order to get the representative through the body presentation is consistent with negotiation with the capital owner (capitalism), negotiation with production (the photographer and stylist), and negotiation with society. The study also found a challenge to the patriarchal concept in magazines by women who nominated their own representatives. They showed the beauty image presentation while the camera and lens were tools to present their images. They built the meaning of nude images based on their own concept and imagination. However, the negotiation was limited by capitalism and patriarchy while the models had no chance to say no and none of them blamed the customers who bought and saw those images (Maison, 2001).

The study of violence against women through magazines found the same results as the study through movies. It represented the women's image idealistically as Ratsaranuwat (2001) found: women's magazines had only one way to portray the feminine, by focusing on the image intention; they also had one way to show unsuccessful people—as followers only. Other feminine styles were represented by magazines in different ways and mostly showed a passive image of Thai women.

In the presentation of patriarchy, Ratsaranuwat (2001) found that women who accepted that men were successful and always the leaders, had more sex appeal and no inclination to refuse the patriarchy. The magazines for men accepted men and women totally in the same manner. They accepted women as sexual objects, beneath men in sexual matters, unsuccessful and only followers, while they accepted men as strong, interested in sports, successful, showing leadership, aggressive, rude, with more sex appeal, above women in sexual matters, and interested and knowledgeable in mechanical technology (e.g. cars) as well.

This was similar to the findings of Pensiri (2008). She found that the beauty of the female body is the best tool for communicating in a changing society and environment. The image of women has changed from the modern to the postmodern period when women have the challenge to express their feminine identity. Therefore the image of trendy women is an attractive image aimed at representing the variety of styles inside a woman.

The presentation of those representations affected the receiver's recognition of the image of women and made an impression. Saejung (2001) studied the representation of Thai women in the media which presented sexual matters, such as publications, videos, computerized media, and karaoke as well as men's perceptions of stereotypes of women. The research found that Thai women in media representations about sexual matters presented only the feminine attributes of shape, figure, smiling face, invitation, proposal, open to opportunity, and making compromises with men. In these representations, women would refuse in the beginning but finally would allow and respond to having sex with men. They always had high sexual needs, passive roles, and were careless in morality and ethics. The stereotype that Thai men perceive of Thai women as represented through such media is that women appear unimpressive, are prostitutes, work or give service only for money, have sex with men easily, express insincere behavior, and are

pretentious and unreliable.

Actually, Thai men's stereotype of Thai women is that they have beautiful faces and figures, are lovely and polite, play a large role in society, are open about relations with the opposite gender, may dress in a sexy way, but are not easily seduced. However, the study found that some Thai men's stereotype of Thai women was that they were easily seduced and did things for money, expressed an innocent look but loved to have sex, especially those who go out at night or are student prostitutes. They also believed that women have inadequate knowledge or misunderstandings about sex.

CONCLUSIONS

The Thai mass media play a very important role, both as an institution and a mechanism for the transmission of patriarchal customs, by perpetuating the discourse on violence against women in many ways, such as violence against women, gender and physical beauty, women as sexual products, traditional sexual traditions, culture, and Thai values. The mass media select language specifically to present certain sexual definitions and thereby build the stereotype which clearly reflects the communication problem about sex in Thailand.

Many research studies support that patriarchy affects the presentation of the discourse on violence against women through the language in the mass media, which builds social truths that women are the victims of violence, that sex is a personal issue, that sexual harassment of women is normal, and that there is inequality in the power relationships in Thai society. These affect the status of Thai women, who are still only sexual objects and under men's power, as reproduced continuously through all the media.

From an analysis of the discourse on violence against women in the Thai mass media, academics should be aware of the influence of the mass media and find appropriate approaches for positive social change. This would create a movement towards the correct understanding, a change from a patriarchy system to human rights awareness of sexual equality, by using the mass media to support women's power in negotiations with the patriarchy.

SUGGESTIONS

Further studies should focus more on the cultural dimension in Thai society and how it supports patriarchy. Moreover, they should consider the role and influence of the digital media such as the internet, as a new media with many features of speed and unlimited access, on its role and what it can transmit about violence against women in Thai society.

Besides the language used by the mass media, new studies should focus on women as knowledge builders from their own stories through the media. They should analyze the roles women have in the mass media, both qualitative and quantitative, how they are aware of and understand their roles, how they define their identity, how they understand and manage their own power negotiation, etc. This will lead to an understanding of women's potential as knowledge builders from their own stories to set the sexual discourse through the mass media.

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