

Media Impact on Girls in the US, China and India through a Gendered Filter

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Abstract

While infanticide or sex selective abortion in rural areas of the world may seem to have little to do with a famous musician who is a domestic abuser from the first world who avoids criminal punishment while being applauded and glamourized, the message going out to girls is consistent: they are not valued in the same way that boys are. In order to make adequate recommendations for change to increase the benefit of media, one must look to its source, its use, and its locale. Media literacy schemes may be seen as a localized plan for significant change, and can certainly be of use. However, its impact will be felt globally by addressing the issue at its source by engaging girls in the creation of media early as a career goal, resulting in lasting transformation, rather than decrying the end products and lack of effective public policy.

Being familiar with cultural norms is essential to build impactful educational campaigns. Money can be spent by governments or NGOs to increase positive messages, but if it is not possible for the locals to implement the message in their daily lives through the buy-in of local officials and leaders, lasting change is not possible whether it be in the case of Ms. Feng in China (forced late term abortion by family planning officials) or Mr. Brown (known batterer and singer who continues to be rewarded through fame and fortune, suffering little consequence for his crimes) in the United States. Stealthy advertising campaigns and hidden “cookie gathering” of children’s data only further exacerbate the impact of negative messages to girls by gathering information on them about their potential “weaknesses” in the form of desire, and what they search for online (food, beauty, fame) and what they crave to be, or look like in order for corporations to sell to them. And of course, what is sold to them (even in the form of an idea) filters out to their greater society, in the context that they live in.

Introduction

While infanticide or sex selective abortion in rural areas of the world may seem to have little to do with a famous musician domestic abuser from the first world who avoids criminal punishment while being applauded and glamourized, the message going out to girls is consistent: they are not valued in the same way that boys are. The media that influences girls throughout the world generally originates in the West, and is almost always created and disseminated by males. Media that is not solely a Western creation is often a simple mimicry of existing media. In poverty-stricken neighborhoods, best-intentioned media campaigns dot the landscape of billboard signage, and community programs abound. These large signs may tout the importance of education, with the simple positive intention of encouraging children to pursue it. However, if

their schools are dangerous, lack basic resources, or the children do not have transportation, the likelihood of the message having any impact is dubious at best.

Even rural areas of the world with little access to media reflect Western influence, messages that are primarily generated by males. In the Western world, whether or not children have access to broadcast media, messages filter out to them in a mostly negative way. Even when living physically close to an affluent neighborhood, the child's personal situation of poverty, violence, poor hygiene, and poor physical or mental health changes little if there is not a middle entity to help implement changes, especially when there are no means to do so. Women leaders in globalized government are scarce, which makes advocating for public policy a great challenge to constituents that are action oriented.

Whether first world or third world media and messages are analyzed, one factor remains constant: Girls are told who they should be and who they should seek to become primarily through the lens of males, and most often those messages come through media and a Western male framework. This article takes a closer look at two particular areas of the world's media: China and India as reflected through a Western (mostly U.S.) lens.

The United States, specifically Hollywood, is well known for its creation of entertainment that is sold worldwide. However, a look at two countries that not only purchase and disseminate Hollywood created media but create a substantial amount of their own media gives a more globalized view, and how (in China's case, specifically) government control of media and advertising can have an effect on girls. These government "controls" appear in extreme forms (what may be seen as too lax in one area of the world, or in another almost entirely controlled by government entities). Integrating women's voices as part of mainstream media is a matter of globalized public policy. A not-so-subtle gender discrimination continues to support a foundation where it is next to impossible to create actionable change. An incredible financial investment has been made on the part of corporations to sell to the world's children, and have used every available method to reach the greatest number, regardless of the consequences.

Rational Choice Theory

Rational Choice Theory as explained by Whistler and Ellickson (2010) posited that women who are in politics (United States Legislators) will like men, be influenced by personal economic benefits of the policy put before the government for vote, rather than be guided by what has been described as an "ethic of caring" as a single factor. Without intention, female leaders are biased by their economic standing. While this study found that like men in similar positions of power or in competitive occupations, women are less supportive for the policies that would be considered "caring" policies. However, regardless of their personal economic status, women political leaders continue to be focused on representing women and the issues that are important

to them. “The problem is that men, having overlapping yet different experiences from women, are not as highly motivated to initiate and carry through the legislative process legislation dealing with women’s issues/ concerns as are women legislators (44).”

Advertising without Informed Consent

A matter that should be brought forward as a matter of public policy and action- oriented change is that of stealthy advertising campaigns embedded in media without consumer, or more specifically, parental knowledge. Often, advertising is presented as a matter of choice when in all practicality, is not. Simple laws that prevent corporations from making opting out any sort of behavior tracking tools should take no more than two minutes to complete (or two clicks). For example, online “games” for children should not be advertisements selling unhealthy foods that put the child “playing” at risk for life threatening diabetes. One cannot blame caregivers present in a child’s life for what they are exposed to when media literacy is lacking or opt-outs are incomprehensible.

Neuromarketing to Girls around the World

Iacoboni's (2006) first attempt at doing “instant-science” based on consumer desire as a result of advertising during the American Super Bowl (televised football tournament) was a collaborative effort between two groups: neuroimaging and FKF Applied Research (marketing). They found that “...there is often a disconnect between what people say about what they like—and the real, underlying deeper motives that make us want and like some things and some people, but not others.” (<http://edge.org/conversation/who-really-won-the-super-bowl>).

Iacobani’s team was able to look at unfiltered brain responses through fMRI and measure how advertisements shown on television elicited emotion, which then induced empathy. What followed was inspiration that was connected to liking and thus the desire for the object advertised. Researchers in this experiment found that while participants said what they are “expected” to say about the content of advertisements (negative influence), their brains responded in the opposite way. One example was of female subjects who said that they found sexy ads offensive, but then the mirror neuron areas lit up substantially, which suggested identification and empathy. Another ad that was successful in this experiment was by Disney, where “...both mirror neuron areas and ventral striatum—indicated by the yellow arrows” showed engagement with the ad (figures 1 & 2).

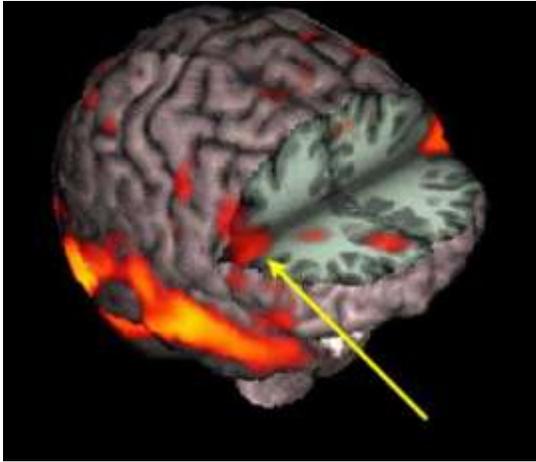


Figure 1 Mirror neuron activity in the right posterior inferior frontal gyrus, indicating identification and empathy while watching a Disney advertisement

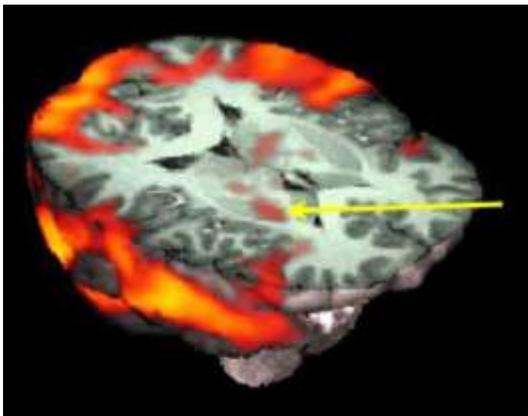


Figure 2 Ventral Striatum activity indicating reward processing while watching a Disney advertisement

Corporations spend countless currency on the science of selling, and are targeting ever more specific groups of children in order to increase revenues. There is an entire industry dedicated to understanding the science of selling through neuromarketing as illustrated by a book aptly named *Brainfluence*. Roger Dooley's book hit the shelves in November 2011 for mainstream marketers. It promises aid in helping them sell through creating emotional responses from potential consumers. It further states on the book flap, "...95% of all thoughts, emotions, and learning occur before we are ever aware of it...if you want to get ahead of your competition, it's time to stop selling to just the 5% of your customer's brain [that is rational]."

Martin Lindstrom, the author of *Buyology: Truth and Lies about What We Buy*, came out in 2008 against many of the techniques used to influence and sell to children without their (or their parents') awareness of what is happening to them while they engage in media. He has spent more than two decades as a highly paid branding agent for many large companies that use the very tactics he writes about. More recently, his message has become even stronger with his most

recent book titled *Brandwashed: Tricks Companies Use to Manipulate Our Minds and Persuade Us to Buy* (2011).

Houpt (2011) stated after his interview with the author,

...with *Brandwashed*, Mr. Lindstrom isn't calling for a ban on any specific marketing practice; rather, he believes that educating people on the darker arts of marketing will make them savvier, more skeptical consumers—who will, if need be, put the screws to companies. To that end, he offers up a comprehensive catalogue of shady tactics, from the classic and unsurprising (sex sells) to the cutting-edge (forget viral videos; how about marketing to fetuses?). He puts forward evidence that the particular buzz made by a ringing iPhone is calibrated to tap something deep in our brains that makes us feel love. He runs through dozens of examples of marketers inappropriately targeting children with products that sexualize them. (p.1)

“Parents of small children who read this book will cringe (while lunging for the power button on the computer). Savvy marketers will take notes.”

—*Fortune Magazine*

This researcher set out to interview one of the most impactful networks in the world: Viacom (annual earnings of approximately 13 billion U.S. dollars) (marketwatch.com May 30, 2012). Both MTV and Nickelodeon come under the parent company of Viacom and reach a staggering number of girls around the world and more specifically, in the three countries that this paper is focusing on: The United States, China and India. Asking questions about media creation, and who is involved as well as the mixed messages promoted to girls who watch their programming was an important step in better understanding how girls are influenced by the media that they are exposed to, as well as the intentionality behind advertising. Specifically, one case at MTV Networks will be more closely examined to better illustrate the financial conflict of interest that wins out over the well being of girls who view such messages. Lewis (1990) stated, “It is unfortunate that female scholars bear the brunt of enlightening the disciplines about gender formations. It should not require the experience of living under oppression to create an agenda for understanding its operations (8).”

Interviews with MTV Executives

Nickelodeon (which is owned and operated by MTV Networks, a division of Viacom) was careful to set itself apart in 1996 with Lisa Judson, the then-Senior Vice President, Creative Director, and Chief of Staff, stating, “We saw what other people were creating for kids and most of it was action-based, violent, toy-based stuff. Instead, we decided to go for evergreen stories and characters that really connect with kids. Shows like *Rugrats* and *Doug* are very Nickelodeon, because they come with a kid's point of view.”

Goldman (1996) stated while reflecting on his interview with Judson,

The challenge for the Nickelodeon people is how to build their brand while staying within the confines of their self-professed programming policy: to create product with a "kids point of view" and "connect kids with kids." Judson emphasized that policy repeatedly during a recent interview, making it quite clear she and other company executives feel creating kid-friendly, nonviolent cartoons and selling them around the world in no way conflicts with the mission of luring profits.

Nickelodeon has now been providing children's programs for thirty-one years. However, with the recent development of Teen Nick, an August 2011 press release from the company that emphasized its male-driven perspective contained this statement by Sarah Levy, (Chief Operating Officer, Nickelodeon/MTVN Kids and Family Group), "Over the past seven years, Keith has built Nicktoons into the fastest growing kids' network with a relentless focus on boys," said Levy. "We are confident that Keith will bring this same passion to the teen audience in this expanded role." It is difficult to believe that this type of mindset would translate into covering the issues that effect Nickelodeon's female viewers in equal measure.

When this researcher was interviewing Janice Gatti, Senior Director at MTV (her shows being *mtvU*, *Public Affairs*, *16 & Pregnant*, *Teen Mom*, *mtvU Woodie Awards*) in September 2011, her view was positive concerning many of MTV's shows and how their MTV community pages, programs, and PSA (Public Service Announcements) content have helped raise awareness on teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and subsequent testing, as well as domestic violence regardless of the difficulty of finding such messages buried in an obscure place on the MTV.com website. In fact, on June 29, 2012, it seemed that the Community pages were no longer directly accessible from *any* of MTV.com's main pages.

The Case of Chris Brown: Promotion of Violence Against Women

This researcher is still waiting for answers to other questions that Gatti had passed on to another executive regarding mixed messages to young women, most notably about the 2011 Video Music Awards (VMA) and the fact that they had as a featured artist and performer (promoting his album) Chris Brown, a known batterer who severely beat his girlfriend at the time, (fellow musician) Rihanna, the night before the Grammy Awards. As of June 29, 2012, executives had not replied to these specific questions as promised.

Two months before the Video Music Awards in the United States, Chris Brown was on a morning television news program to promote his new album. After the interview, between the two song performances, he walked off the stage, tore off his shirt, and threw a chair through a large window in the studio before running out onto the street. Still, MTV welcomed him to the

stage to be broadcast to millions. To add insult to injury, after his performance beloved pop star Justin Bieber stood up and pumped his fist excitedly stating, “That’s my boy!” This was an endorsement of his performance, and a particular message was received by his more than twelve million Twitter fans at that time (twitter.com/justinbieber, September 16 2011). He is an incredibly influential adolescent, and to add to the impact (in a matter of months), his influence in this form of social media nearly doubled to 22 million followers (twitter.com/justinbieber, May 30, 2012).

Oh, I think it is very possible, many of us do, that MTV orchestrated that whole Chris Brown thing just to boost ratings and make money. People who would have never watched it heard about the possibility of him showing up and suddenly they are like (mimicking picking up a remote control and turning the television on). Oh, yeah. What a great message for girls [sarcasm]. (Male, film director)

After searching around on the MTV website for some time in September 2011, this researcher finally came across the “Community” pages at MTV.com where a “Dear Rihanna” Public Service Announcement video clip was housed in order to raise awareness about domestic violence (there is no longer direct access from the website). However, in all of the media talk after the VMAs, this researcher never found anything online or viewed anything on broadcast media that used this clip that seemed to be an opposing view of Chris Brown’s physically abusive behavior. The message that MTV put out to young girls was confusing. “Violence is a crime and should never be excused” are the last words on display at the end of the MTV public service announcement clip, which can be found (with this link) at <http://www.mtv.com/videos/misc/516512/dear-rihanna.jhtml>. However, actually finding it in the more obscure pages of the website can take a great deal of time, as it is not prominently displayed, and difficult to search.



Figure 3 Message at end of "Dear Rihanna" Public Service Announcement on MTV.com

Finally, even though the Rihanna animated clip said that violence is a crime that cannot be excused, the girl speaking in the voice-over was talking about how Chris Brown was nervous

and sad when he made his public apology and that her boyfriend didn't apologize, but just purchased a gift for her. In this researcher's opinion, it was yet another mixed message that made it sound as if Mr. Brown's behavior was being excused because he made a public apology. He suffered no consequences to his admitted battering of his girlfriend (aside from picking up trash as community service), nor his subsequent violent display on the morning show. In fact he was rewarded with more publicity and improved record sales worth millions of dollars. Most recently, when this researcher was taking a last look at the MTV.com main website, prominently displayed was a photo of Chris Brown and a (now reunited) Rihanna with a promotion for their music video to be played on MTV in the coming days entitled, "Love in Trouble", which will, of course, make the network millions of dollars in profit.

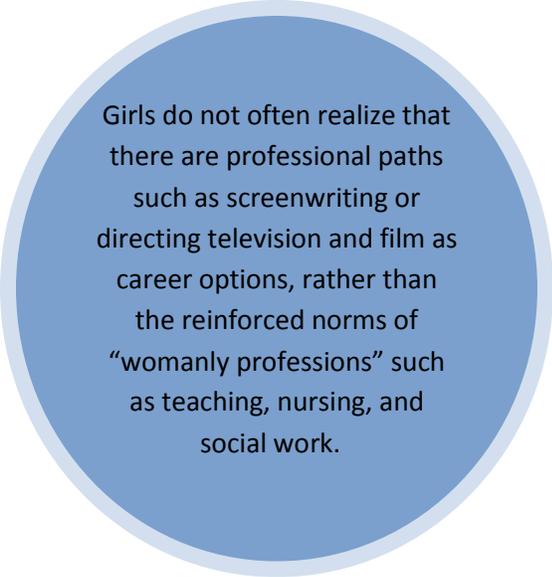


Figure 4 Chris Brown (known perpetrator of domestic violence) promotion by MTV June 29, 2012

It seems as though, since the 1980's, decision makers at MTV have not been directly accessible, as was the case during the writing of this report. Research on MTV is generally based "off the record" and with carefully scripted public statements. Serge Denisoff (2009) stated, "Making researchers task more problematic is that most of the key players such as John Lack, were unavailable for journalistic or scholarly probes as of 1983. Orwellian "double speak" became the ethos (339)."

MTV Shows about Teen Pregnancy

Two of MTV's other shows are *Teen Mom* and *16 and Pregnant*. This researcher believes that the intention of programming was originally positive and had the goal of steering girls away from unintended pregnancy. However, now these teen mothers are featured on the cover of



Girls do not often realize that there are professional paths such as screenwriting or directing television and film as career options, rather than the reinforced norms of “womanly professions” such as teaching, nursing, and social work.

tabloid magazines in American grocery stores and fill online celebrity gossip blogs. School districts are having a rash of teen pregnancies (not accidental, but purposeful). Whether or not these shows are directly influencing sexual behavior is yet to be seen, but at the least, while “raising awareness of teen pregnancy” (Gatti, MTV, personal communication), the broadcast media is normalizing, and generating immense profit from it.

During a phone conversation with Gatti on September 16, 2011, she stated that the teen pregnancy shows, “*are* the girls lives” when asked about how girls’ input or involvement happens when creating show content about girls. She was

unable to point out any policy or practices that point to MTV’s authenticating girls’ experiences or portrayal. Finally, in an interview with Bernadette Simpao (2011, personal communication), she stated that “MTV aims to entertain, reflect, lead and educate young people through its provocative and cutting edge content and communication...MTV's philosophy, STAY RAW, is an idea that encourages young people to be and do only what they want to.” It seems to this researcher that there are indeed some mixed messages given to youth through their platform relevant to “leading” and “educating.”

When looking at the messages young girls receive through media, one must determine how they develop their sense of what becoming a woman is and what her future role possibilities are, fitting into their respective local society. This becomes difficult to separate when advertising to girls as a specific population to buy the wares or services of the advertisers is on the table in the same place that they are receiving messages about who they are, and who they desire to be. And they are inexorably intertwined. As of the writing of this report, this researcher is awaiting a promised response from two studio executives at MTV that promised to get answers to related questions as soon as possible, but have failed to follow through, having had ample time to do so.

Ad Campaign Influence on the Overall Health and Girls Sense of Self

Advertising to children has made more technological progress than just about any other form of advertising. Parents have little understanding of this phenomenon, and thus, lack the ability to fight the messages. In the United States, with the invention of DVR devices (allowing one to skip commercials) the selling to children is done in other ways, such as product placement within a show or film, or by “cookie collection” while accessing online or mobile content. However, while the ads promote thin, beautiful, energetic, healthful girls, they are often selling the opposite

(processed junk foods and unhealthy chemical- or sugar-laden drinks).

Robbins (2011), who is an advocate of both personal freedom and parental responsibility, agreed to sign an open letter sent to corporations that use well-researched psychological tactics to sell their goods. Medical doctors in this case called out McDonald's in particular to change their advertising strategy. Marketing junk food to impressionable children in ways that parents don't understand removes control from the parents. He went on to discuss the "the pester factor." "The public relations companies who produce these ads speak happily of making kids 'obnoxious,' or of getting them to 'drive their parents crazy'" (Robbins 2011).

There are many studies supporting the theory that the effect of advertising is detrimental to children's health and well-being. Bakir and Vitell (2009) found that in recent years the budget to reach children has increased significantly, and "...ethical views of food advertising targeting children...related to parents' beliefs concerning at least some dimensions of moral intensity are significantly related to their ethical judgments and behavioral intentions of food advertising targeting children" (p. 299). Whether ad campaigns are selling food, beauty products, or fashion, the hope they sell along with the product is that she will feel better, look better, be more popular, and attract romantic attention.

Global Presentation of Girls: A Minor Role

To take a global view, 2010's Global Media Monitoring Project found that only 24 percent of the persons interviewed, heard from, talked about, seen, or read about in media were female. So, regardless of the region of the world, girls receive a skewed perception of the world through *every form* of media that they engage in, even passively. After enduring filters placed by degrees of press freedom, and the interpretation of male (or written for male) writers, screenwriters and direction (viewpoint) of males, their view of the world will continue to lack authenticity. Further, the males watching the same content will continue to receive the same reinforced messages that filter out to their own relationships with family and society (at all socioeconomic levels).

Further, *The Business Standard* reported on July 1, 2012 that, "Fewer women make it to the boardroom of companies in leading Asian economies, including India, creating a shortage of talent that is hurting the growth of the region, a top consultancy firm's report has said. Women hold eight per cent of executive committee seats in the Asian firms, still lower than the average of 10 per cent in Europe and 14 per cent in the US (Press Trust of India)."

Three Regions at a Glance According to Press Freedoms

Press freedom is one of the first filters that affect media messages going out to girls throughout the world. In an international system dominated by the United States but subject to significant shifts of power to other, less-established countries, it is natural that there are growing efforts to analyze, understand, and group these rising actors (Stuenkel 2011: 178). Steunkel explored the concept of the West, and how it serves to give other countries a reference point in conversations on topics such as media, even if it is to push them in the opposite direction by using the West as an example of the polar opposite of values held, such as Asian versus Western, where the former is passive and fatalist and the latter is rational.

The degree of press freedom enjoyed by the United States, India, and China were ranked according to the Press Freedom Index Report (2010). The United States is ranked number 20 in the world, while India is 122nd, and China is 171st.



Figure 5 Degree of Press Freedom by Country

The Freedom House rankings (2011) use simple terms: Free, Partly Free, and Not Free. Civil liberties and political rights are assessed, including relatively free and independent media (Puddington 2011). (See figure 5.)

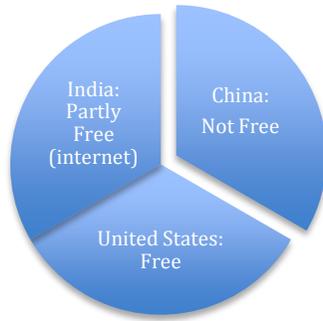


Figure 6 Press and Internet Freedom by Region

The Occupy Wall Street movement (citizens protesting the power of corporations and bank control) in the United States has brought to light citizen complaints about media ownership and lack of reporting on the protests that countries other than the United States have been heavily reporting on, bringing up the question of whether the United States press is truly as “free” as it is reputed to be (see wearethe99percent.tumblr.com).

Regardless of the degree of press freedom, girls are receiving messages filtered through the viewpoint of males. Increased filtering (censoring) only compounds the issue of authenticity; even if all words are removed (in any language), the visual message remains: Men are preferred, and if women are viewed, it is in certain specific contexts (often sexualized). Further, when one looks at the United States and its major media ownership (of all media forms), it is easy to see that the control of media ownership is top heavy, with one company (General Electric) owning \$157 billion worth of media (General Electric , 2010). In contrast, the next five most powerful media ownership companies (Disney ranked a distant second) added up to only approximately two thirds of what the number one spot controls. This means that one company has control over the majority of messages that go out through various forms of media in the world, with the vast majority of decision makers, creators and buyers of media, male.

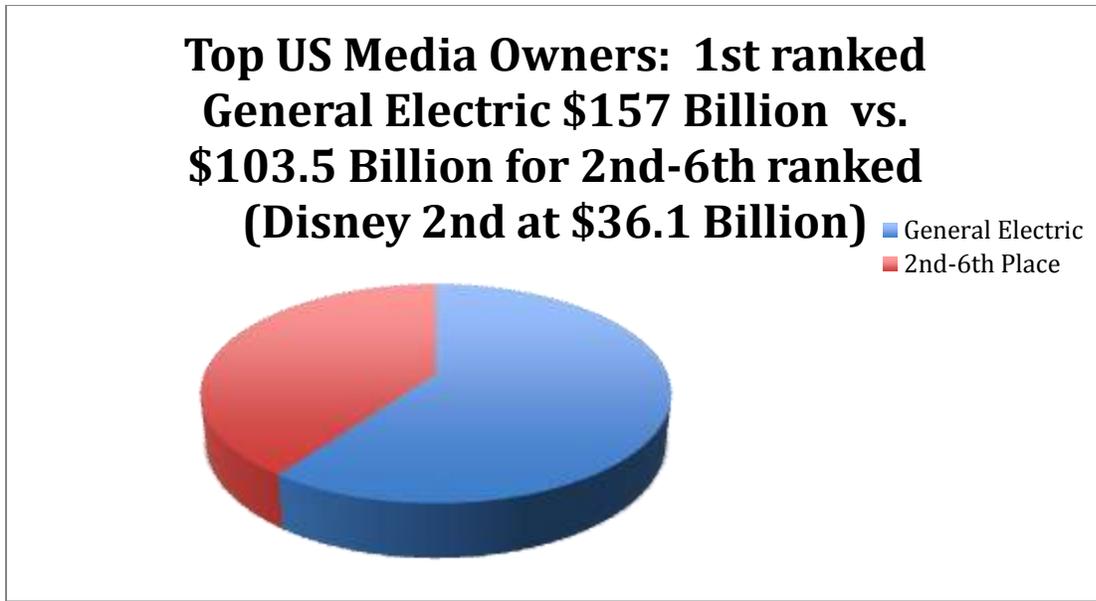


Figure 7 US Media Ownership (Top Heavy) One company controls more messages than the next five combined.

Case of the Missing Girls of India and China: Promotion of Violence Against Women

While the more affluent families of India and China have media access similar to those in the West, there are two extremes at work in India—more girls are going to college than ever and there continues to be a great number of “missing” girls—consistently, a significant number of females are not being born according to the projected birth rate, and in comparison to male births. Hudson (2010) reported that in particular, India and China have large numbers of absent females, approximately 163 million in Asia.

India’s Girls

In rural India, little girls grow up in school classes where they are one of the few girls present, and their peers are mostly boys. Shahani (2012) reported that one of the toughest places in which to be an unborn baby girl is India, “With a ratio of 112 men: 100 women, we can understand Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen’s deepening concern about the millions of missing women in the region. Some states like Punjab have sex ratios as high as 1.20. Every day, women are trafficked into brothels in Mumbai and elsewhere... Already, the United Nations has estimated the systematic killing of females—or femicide—at over 100 million girls. (Rappler)”

While upper-caste India enjoys most of the Westernized benefits that Americans do, the message to girls in rural India is that their value is less than boys, from the very beginning (Hudson 2011). Nearly half of the women in India continue to be illiterate (*Times of India*), and many of the little girls born into poverty have little or no media exposure, so the messages about

who they are to become are directly related to their environment, and who is present in it. Gulshun Rehman, Health Programme Development Adviser at Save the Children UK stated, "In India, women and girls continue to be sold as chattels, married off as young as 10, burned alive as a result of dowry-related disputes and young girls exploited and abused as domestic slave labour. This is despite a groundbreakingly progressive Domestic Violence Act enacted in 2005 outlawing all forms of violence against women and girls (Reuters, June 2012)."

China's Girls

In China, nearly half of the undergraduate and graduate student populations are girls, while in 1978 it was only 24 percent. Credit for this advancement for girls is a nod to the one-child policy. The dark side of this policy continues to be the practice of sex-selective infanticide and abortion, especially in rural areas where they do not have access to technology that determines the gender of the child. Gendercide continues to be common practice, even by family planning officials (Associated Press, August 31 2011; The Economist June 23, 2012). The country with the largest number of 'missing' girls was reported by Bulte, Heerick and Zhang to be China, with 40 Million (2011). Their belief was that approximately half of the 'missing' girls are a direct result of China's One Child Policy that has historically resulted in a heavy preference for males (21).



In this photograph the young mother lies on a clinic bed, her hair obscuring her face. She appears as inert as the baby lying beside her. But 23-year-old Feng Jianmei is still alive, whereas her baby girl is not. The baby was killed while still in the womb by an injection arranged by local family-planning officials. They restrained Ms Feng, who was seven months pregnant, and then induced her to give birth to the dead baby (The Economist June 23, 2012, Shanghai).

Even in the case of Ms. Feng, although the local mayor (a leader in the community) apologized for what happened in the year 2012, there is a disconnect between public policy (which includes informed consent) and the practice of the local Family Planning agents. In this case, they tracked her down to a local house and pulled her from underneath a bed while laughing and injected her baby in the womb (old enough to withstand life outside of her body) with a life ending substance then forced M. Feng to give birth in what appears to be common practice.

Alexa Olesen from the Associated Press stated in 2011 in the UK-based newspaper the *Guardian*:

“It is gendercide,” said Therese Hesketh, a University College London professor who has studied China's skewed sex ratio. “I don't understand why China doesn't just really penalize people who've had sex-selective abortions and the people who do them. The law exists but nobody enforces it.” To combat the problem, China allows families in rural areas, where son preference is strongest, to have a second child if their first is a girl. The government has also launched education campaigns promoting girls and gives cash subsidies to rural families with daughters. Still, 43 million girls have “disappeared” in China due to gender-selective abortion as well as neglect and inadequate access to health care and nutrition, the United Nations estimated in a report last year. Yin Yin Nwe, UNICEF's representative to China, puts it bluntly: The one-child policy brings many benefits for girls “but they have to be born first.”

Although there has been progress educationally for girls, the issue of the “missing” girls is ominous. Public campaigns to curb sex-selective abortion and infanticide are only useful if there is local buy-in and implementation of the message. If there is no personal connection to the media message, and no means to achieve it, it is simply discarded in the way one would ignore a message about a lovely trip around the world that costs as much as a nice house in the city. While the advertisement (message) may have been noticed, it was immediately discarded since it has no relation to the person's real-life circumstances. The campaign writer or message producer is not the family planning administrator who is telling you as a pregnant female that you must abort the child that you are carrying or pay a fine equal to your yearly salary. The result of an advocate's lack of cultural expectations and public policy awareness is a program that is rebuffed or simply shows lack of effectiveness.

“The outrageous and violent forced-abortion incident in June is not unique to Shaanxi”, wrote Liang Jianzhang, on Sina Weibo, China's version of Twitter. Mr Liang is chief executive of Ctrip, one of China's most successful travel companies. “Abolition of the absurd family-planning policy is the only way to root out this kind of evil,” he went on. Mr Liang's post has been retweeted more than 18,000 times (The Economist, June 23, 2012).”

In more modernized and affluent China, girls are significantly influenced by western media and unnaturally and unhealthy ideals for feminine beauty. Lam, Fung, Ho, Lee & Stewart (2009) found that girls in Hong Kong were excessively influenced by media pressure to diet to unnatural form and called for public policy to curb the promotion of an impossible ideal for girls,

which included an educational piece for societal understanding of the dangers of extreme dieting.

China

China's Own Version of Media

China was not included in worldwide reports for social media, as Facebook was banned by the Chinese government, creating an anomaly in worldwide statistics (a black hole for social networking). If China were to allow their citizens access to Facebook, the worldwide statistics would change. However, this does not mean that the Chinese are missing out on this type of microblogging and communication networking. They have created their own mega search engine akin to Google (where the government can monitor use in the way that they see fit) called Baidu, and citizens use QQ, which is similar to Facebook with the ability to video chat with other users. Lee (2012) suggested that it is probably too late for Facebook in China, as even Google failed to create a market share of searches in this populous country.

In 2011, Facebook was in talks with the Chinese government to allow Facebook to be used within China's borders, but on the condition that Chinese users could not link to users outside of the country. The Council on Foreign Relations noted that criticism outside of the country regarding their censoring of certain websites or publications had little or no effect on the policy making in China, since most reasoning was tied to their law on guarding state secrets regardless of their constitutional rights that guarantee freedom of expression (Bennett 2011).

“The universal problem of researching major media organizations is exacerbated with the current, rapid growth of satellite channels in societies under authoritarian (Figenschau 2010).” The world's most populous country is well known for being the most filtered and censored media in the world, especially with regard to the internet (Tang & Yang 2011). Even when certain forms of media or Westernized television channels such as CNN are allowed, it seems that they are accessible to only a tiny fraction of China's residents, often through the costlier satellite services used by Western expatriates or military outposts. Minemura (2010) reported that China banned media from reporting on eighteen subjects:

China has prohibited the Chinese media from reporting on 18 subjects, including yuan revaluation, corruption and problems in Tibet and the Xinjiang Uighur autonomous region. Liu Yunshan, director of the publicity department of China's Communist Party, faxed notifications about the bans to major newspaper companies, television and radio stations and Internet news companies on Sunday. The following day, Google announced its withdrawal from China's Internet search market. According to a senior official of a Chinese media company, the current censorship is "among the largest ever" and exceeds that imposed before the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The 18 banned topics also include the difficulties faced by university students in finding jobs after graduation, food safety and rising prices of cooking oil. "Most of the subjects that people are interested in have been banned. We don't know what to report on," said an official at a Chinese newspaper. (March 26, 2011)

Two days before closing out this report there were two news stories online in the United States that stated, “China renews Google's website license” and “China is going to continue to allow Google to operate in China” (CNN). However, on the day this researcher was finishing this report, neither story seemed to exist, as both stories were no longer on their respective web pages. However, the country’s poor citizens are not blocked from access to media or governmental messages.

I spent six months studying Chinese in Northeastern China. In China, even the poorest of the urban poor are exposed to media. They live on the streets or in tin or cardboard shanties and are exposed to flashing billboards and the state-issued newspapers that are posted around town, particularly at bus stops. Many of the poorest poor are literate to a degree because Mao simplified the Chinese language and implemented a widespread public education program that may not teach critical thinking but does teach literacy and the state mantras. Many of the messages girls hear are those they are taught at school and include “success is most important” and loyalty to one’s country should be a priority. (American undergraduate student, age 19)

This mindset is further illustrated by the case of Ms. Feng, where as of the writing of this report had gone ‘missing’ after the family had been increasingly harassed and beaten by community members for their failure to conform to society. “More than 40 men and women arrived at the hospital holding two banners reading ‘Beat the traitors soundly and expel them from Zengjia township’ (China News 24)”.

Dictatorship Filter Illustration: China

Post Secret, the anonymous, free, secret sharing and photo upload service displays China on a Google-based map, but the “secrets” seem to reflect those of Westerners (often government or military residents) and is largely “empty” in comparison with the rest of the world, illustrating lack of access. (See figures 7 & 8).



Figure 8 Lack of Access to Post Secret in China with small exceptions (Open Map)

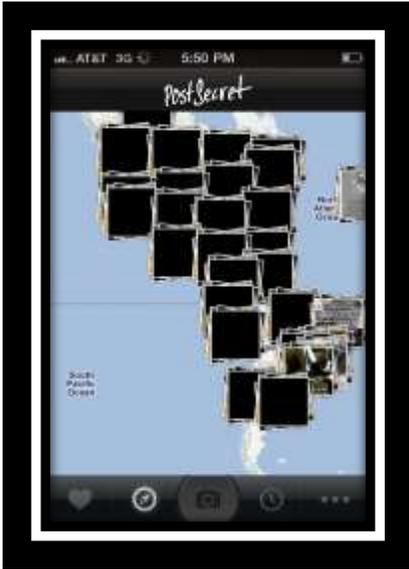


Figure 9 Rest of World Post Secret access overlaps similarly without “open” (censored) spaces

Breaking Through Dictated Filters

Tang and Yang (2011) took a close look at the “grass-mud horse incident,” where Chinese citizens were using “secret” words to subversively rebel against communist rule and censorship in China through various forms of media. The incident went as far as having plush toys made as a symbolic mascot (and looked much like an alpaca or llama). The free video sharing service Youtube.com (owned by Google) was banned in 2009, and many saw this as a direct reaction to the grass-mud horse incident where video clips ran rampant online. Youtube is a free service that provides a simple way to make one’s own productions (even with a cell phone video camera) and upload what one wishes for the world to see with easily searched labels. In 2011, the *South China Morning Post* reported that media outlets and reporters are given a guide on how to report (or not report) on sensitive issues as seen by SARFT (State Administration of Radio, Film and Television).

Wang and Barboza (2011) stated in the *New York Times* in January 31, 2011,

In another era, China’s leaders might have been content to let discussion of the protests in Egypt float around among private citizens, then fizzle out. But challenges in recent years to authoritarian governments around the globe and violent uprisings in parts of China itself have made Chinese officials increasingly wary of leaving such talk unchecked, especially on the Internet, the medium some officials see as central to fanning the flames of unrest. So the arbiters of speech sprang into action over the weekend. Sina.com and

Netease.com — two of the nation's biggest online portals — blocked keyword searches of the word "Egypt," though the mass protests were being discussed on some Internet chat rooms on Monday. Searching for "Egypt" has also been blocked on Weibo, the Chinese equivalent of Twitter.

While it is apparent that China has a focused interest in filtering or outright blocking information they feel is inappropriate, in a surprising turn, it appears that mega corporation Disney is getting the "green light" to create not only a park in China, but have also partnered on film making.

Financial Interests Headed by Males: China Partners with Disney

Bloomberg (2011) reported that Disney would be partnering with a government-owned entity to invest approximately \$4.4 billion in Shanghai for the creation of another amusement park, the second for the world's most populated nation. "Disney has the strongest China strategy of all the media companies," said Alan Gould, who further stated. "A longer term goal is to negotiate wider distribution of films in China and the creation of a 24-hour television channel."

Simpao, representing Nickelodeon in China to this interviewer also stated,

Viacom International Media Networks' Chinese operations are based in Beijing with studio facilities in Guangzhou. Since its launch in 2003, MTV has become the leading music and entertainment brand in the mainland, and was the first global media brand to be given approval by China's State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) to launch a 24-hour television network. MTV China is available in more than 13 million homes in Guangdong, hotels and other foreign compounds, and MTV China programming is seen in over 136 million households via syndication and co-productions with partners such as CCTV, SMG, Guangdong Satellite, BTV and more. MTV has also made historic inroads in multiplatform programming with content agreements with China's largest mobile operator, China Mobile, leading online portals Ku6, Kaixin and others. MTV China is also seen in Singapore, Hong Kong, Macau, Indonesia and Australia.

Simpao concluded by sharing Nickelodeon's reach in China by discussing the multi-platform success of their brand in Mainland China.

Nickelodeon and CCTV's business relationship has led to a string of successes in China. *SpongeBob SquarePants* has consistently been one of the highest rated animated programs in China, broadcast daily to over 300 million homes on CCTV1 and CCTV's children's channel, CCTV14, which also broadcasts the popular pre-school series, *Dora the Explorer*. The Nickelodeon Kids Choice Honors has been produced in partnership with CCTV and broadcast to more than 300 million homes throughout the country. Nickelodeon was also the first international broadcaster to provide officially sanctioned online video content via the web.

Nickelodeon has experienced tremendous success in the consumer products arena, with brand extensions of *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Dora the Explorer*, and others represented across multiple categories.

China’s broadcast media is largely state (government) owned and overseen by the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, which is overseen by the State Council of the People’s Republic of China. Most of China’s broadcast through radio and television are through China Central Television (CCTV), China National Radio, and China Radio International. (See figure 10).

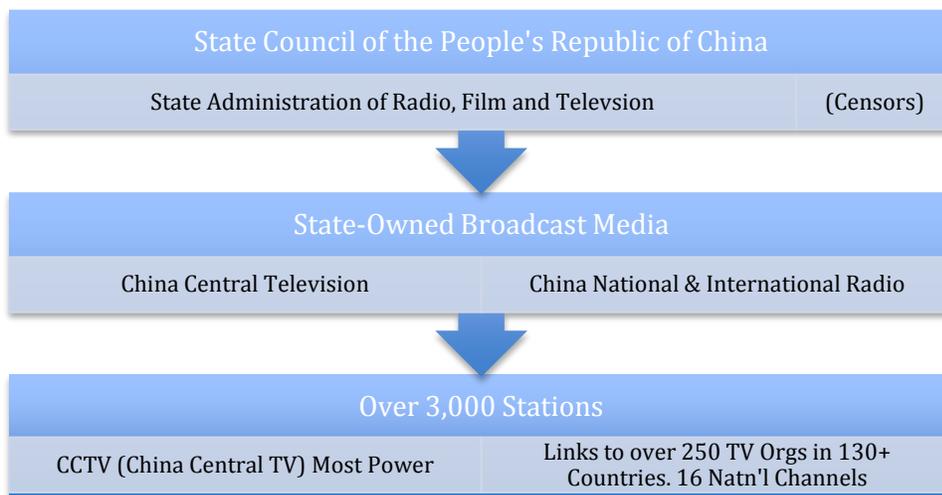


Figure 10 Media ownership in China

The role of censorship in China can be seen as a way to support the rule of the Communist Party in China, without outside influence. While most arguments for censorship in China center around morality (specifically against extreme pornography or violence in film) it also seems that there is argument that China holds a double standard that is more strongly correlated with keeping the financial income within China’s borders. For instance, Google has been accused by the Chinese government of having “obscene” content, while the Chinese competitor Baidu has similar content. This simply means that an argument can be made that the messages that females receive in China are not nearly as dissimilar from the West as many would believe, since generating the greatest revenue possible seems to be the primary goal, regardless of the location of media owners.

Further, China missed a deadline in March 2011 to loosen state control on foreign media, (a World Trade Organization ruling) which allowed only twenty foreign films per year. The American Motion Picture Association of America blamed the restrictions for the high rate of piracy of Hollywood films, which is a financial issue given that China ranked sixth in worldwide box office revenues (Pierson 2011). As of the writing of this report in September 2011, control

was still held by the state and the WTO ruling has been largely ignored, although Hollywood studios have been attempting to partner with state-owned media to create films that appeal to both the Chinese and Western populations. However, this has been a struggle, given the tight restrictions on artistic freedom and the requirement to cast Communist Party leaders in only the best light (Landreth 2011).

Access Leads to Upheaval and Change

Finally, even in heavily controlled and censored China, girls are being exposed to media and information in ways not projected even ten years ago. This knowledge can help turn the tide of male-dominated messages and content that is filtered largely without female inclusion. By giving girls access to a more open environment through content creation on social networks and filming their own media to post to self-produced websites, they are able to use their creativity and voice to begin change, even if it is within closed borders of their own country. And such horrific examples of open access to information such as the forced late term abortion reported via photo June 23, 2012 around the world was disseminated through Weibo, which is China's version of the microblog Twitter. As horrifying as it was, it was a powerful way to cry for help in a place that no one has listened to for generations.

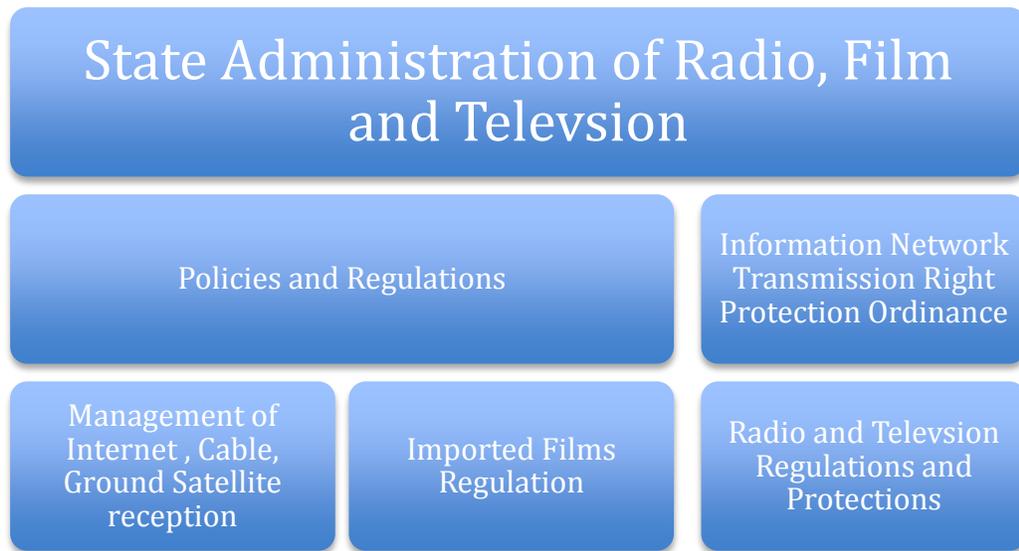


Figure 11 China's State Administration of Radio, Film and Television policies and regulations coverage

India

Bollywood Produces More than Hollywood

India is now the world's largest producer of films, and the American film market with studios such as 20th Century Fox, Sony Pictures, Walt Disney, and Warner Brothers having spent an incredible amount of money investing in this market. For instance, CBS 18 is half owned by

Indian holders (Free Press n.d.). Such motivation is likely due to financial incentive, both in tax breaks for the American companies and by the sheer number of people in the Indian population to “sell” to. Despite all of the partnering with American corporations, Indian media seems to have retained local cultural messages along with excessive beauty claims that seem to be a globalized message and issue for most of the female gender.

The commercials on the channels I watch are full of Western ideas and images. Women wear Western clothing (not the saris that most India women actually wear) in the commercials, but this might be because the products are aimed at the wealthier parts of society who are exposed to the West via travel and more expensive forms of media (movies, TV). The commercials very frequently sell products for increasing one's “fairness,” as they put it. They are selling skin lightening products. The lighter a person is here, the more social power they usually have and the more beautiful they are in Indian society's eyes. Women throughout Asia attempt to avoid the sun at all costs to keep their skin young and light. I see some Asian moms lather up their kids, especially girls, with sunscreen before nearly EVERY venture outdoors. Another focus of commercials is long, lustrous, thick hair that does not suffer from “hair fall,” as they call it. They sell products that are supposed to prevent hair from shedding (I doubt any could actually do that) as they value the thick hair that they all proudly display. The commercials show homes that are very Western looking. I have never seen any home in New Delhi that had the gadgets, modern decor, or general feel that the homes on the commercials display. This type of wealth is uncommon and unattainable for most Indians. (American businesswoman and mother living in India)

India's commercial advertising on television differs from the United States in that women are projected as more “real to life” rather than an image of perfection. It also seems that they have commercial “stars” in a way that American television does not. In fact, in the United States, major film stars will not generally do commercial advertisements (although women stars would do makeup ads in magazines). In the last few years, American actors have promoted some items where before it was a taboo (and seen as “beneath” them). American actress Jennifer Aniston has been promoting a water product and Jennifer Lopez promotes her own perfume and a car brand. For the most part, though, if Americans are promoting products in a commercial on television, it still is generally out of their home country (Brad Pitt has done commercials, but in countries outside of the United States).

Commercials reuse the same three or four female actors over and over and over again. It's almost ridiculous how many commercials you can see the same woman in. These women are Bollywood starlets that also endorse a multitude of products and retailers from jewelers, to soap, cosmetic type products, home products, etc. These three or four women are all slim, but not overly thin. They look healthy and thin, but not as skinny as some models and actresses from the West. Kingfisher Beer models are sometimes a bit “chubby” even...not compared to an everyday American woman, but compared to American models. They are imperfect and not plastic. (American businesswoman and mother living in India)

Traditional broadcast media in India projects more healthy images to young girls than the United States does. High-fashion magazines like *Vogue India* are highly Westernized and tend to promote Westernized ideals of beauty. However, women in India are focused on having fair

skin, and like many other areas of the world, lighter skin is prized. Their *Fair and Lovely* commercials even show a chart of shades of skin lightness that can be achieved through their products. Skin lightening creams jam the shelves in India the way that faux tanning products for Caucasians crowd the shelves in the United States. Ironically, the same company, Unilever, makes both products and markets “improved beauty” through false skin color change, depending on the culture that they are marketing to.

India’s balance of history and modernism requires an openness to accept the dichotomy that Indian girls face as they mature into women. While the most rural areas of India may have little technological influence, the more urban areas, or those with internet and television access, pump out multiple messages that can be seen as conflicting. They can also be viewed as a reflection of how Indian girls balance their interests while pursuing womanhood in a diverse culture.

Google Inc. predicts India will add 200 million Internet users in the next two years, but capitalizing on that huge emerging audience will be challenging in a country where television and newspapers suck up advertising dollars and the government is throwing up regulatory hurdles.

In an interview, Google's country head in India, Rajan Anandan, said the Web giant expects India to reach at least 300 million Internet users by 2014, up from about 100 million now, as telecom carriers invest in high-speed wireless infrastructure and smartphones become cheaper.

Even without those technology advancements, India is already the third-largest Internet consumer in the world (Sharma 2011).

India’s Girls are not Sure What Messages to Heed in their Development

Dwyer (2010) made the argument that Hindi cinema is actually a guide to how the modern Indian thinks. Dwyer did not argue that Bollywood actually reflects the reality of India, but of the desires that motivate its citizens. It is clear that the liberation of the economy back in the early 1990s (Steunkel 2011) accelerated further the changes in the view of an Indian adolescent. State-owned media suddenly had competition from satellite television, which created a more balanced worldview rather than a government message-filtered one. State-owned media opened its filters to include shows produced by MTV and other outside content in order to keep viewers, often drifting away from their earlier moral imperatives. Dwyer pointed out that Hindi Cinema’s biggest consumers were Indian adolescents and young adults aged eighteen to thirty-four (540 million of them) and was the preferred way to spend time if not with family and friends. Further, history is viewed in an interpretive way, calling up historical figures (such as Ghandi) as a mystic guide of sorts, although not historically accurate. Romance is often a central theme, even though the majority of Hindi girls still honor the tradition of arranged marriage.

Most of the American networks broadcast their shows to Indian households, most notably Disney, Nickelodeon, and MTV, although they seem to provide some tailoring for the online

audience. Since India continues to produce much of its own content, it retains much of its own culture in a way that young girls like, as they watch and purchase both Westernized entertainment and consumer products as well as their own. Bernadette Simpao, Executive for MTV and Nickelodeon, stated in a September 20, 2011 interview with this researcher, giving an overview of programming in India,

India's leading kids brand, a part of Viacom18, is available in more than 44 million households in the country. It is a 24-hour pay channel in Hindi, with the option of English, Tamil and Telugu audio feed on DTH. With an approach that puts “kids first,” Nickelodeon takes pride in encouraging kids to be themselves—funny, messy and free-spirited. Being true to its philosophy of connecting with kids wherever they are, Nickelodeon gives kids a complete multi platform brand experience. The touchpoints range from on-ground interactions, digital innovation and consumer products to name a few. Nickelodeon has today become the preferred comedy destination for kids in India, with shows like *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Ninja Hattori*, *Perman*, *Mighty Cat Masked Niyandar*, *Oggy and the Cockroaches*, and *Chibi Maruko Chan*, amongst many others. Believing that “education” and “entertainment” go hand-in-hand at a young age, Nickelodeon offers “edu-taining” shows like *Dora the Explorer* and *Go Diego Go* amongst others in its pre-school block Nick Jr. Given its “award-winning”, “well-researched” and “safe” shows, it's no surprise that Nickelodeon enjoys equal support from the parents as well.

Simpao went on further to explain MTV's role in programming in India:

Globally, MTV has been the leader in youth culture. In India, MTV is distributed to 40 million homes and reaches out to over 100 million unique viewers annually. In the social media space, MTV is the most-followed brand across categories. Targeted brand licensing makes MTV products available across 35 unique categories and the MTV Live business gives young people their dose of MTV, up close and personal. MTV aims to entertain, reflect, lead and educate young people through its provocative and cutting edge content and communication. Be it through cult shows like *MTV Hero Honda Roadies*, *Vodafone MTV Splitsvilla*, *Pulsar MTV Stunt Mania*, *Mirinda MTV Bakra*; or iconic VJ's like *Rannvijay*, *Cyrus*, *Bani*, *Anusha & Nikhil*, or hugely engaging digital properties like *Roadies Battleground*, *MTV Gang Next*, *MTV Ecolution* and big-ticket ground events like *MTV Rockathon* or *MTV Ultimate DJ Championships*, MTV has consistently been among the top three youth brands in the country. MTV's philosophy—STAY RAW—is an idea that encourages young people to be and do only what they want to. Write your own rules, play your own games, be your own hero.

All three regions (China, India, and the United States) share common shows on these networks such as *Spongebob Squarepants* on Nickelodeon and *Paris Hilton, my BFF* (MTV) but don't all broadcast *iCarly* or *The Jersey Shore* (both of which are extremely popular in the United States, but do have numerous parent complaints about messages to their children).

Filters placed on media, with primarily male decision makers, motivated by generating vast income puts the well being of girls at risk. It places their interest behind that of amassing wealth for large global corporations and government entities. Women must be involved in public policy creation to protect the girls and young women placed in the path of a globalized interest of making money above all else. Further, girls need the education to realize their ability

to be involved in media creation or government as a career choice.

“Tell me and I’ll forget, show me and I may remember, but involve me and I’ll understand.” ~ Chinese Proverb

Conclusion and Recommendations

One must be careful not to buy into the myth that if the girls in poverty-stricken neighborhoods had more access to broadcast media to educate them, their lives would improve drastically. This isn’t to say that it is not possible to educate through media. Indeed, it is possible. However, even in the United States, children in inner cities who live far below the poverty line with access to television experience a disconnect with positive media messages and local implementation. Most importantly, girls need to be involved in the creation of media and public policy- mentored by women in positions that can hear and attend to their voices.

This researcher had five years’ experience working in the city of Los Angeles as a children’s social worker in districts such as Compton and Crenshaw (which are generally depicted in popular broadcast media as L.A. “gang neighborhoods”). Although Beverly Hills was approximately 10 kilometers away (another popular American place depicted in global broadcast media) most of the children who lived in the inner city districts had never stepped foot near Beverly Hills. And given the saturation of the American culture into entertainment, most people with access to television around the world have an idea of what the comparison “Beverly Hills and ‘Gang Neighborhoods’ by this researcher means in terms of disparity in American culture.

Access or no access to broadcast media, even if one was living physically close to an affluent neighborhood, their personal situation of poverty, violence, poor hygiene, and poor physical and mental health changed little if there was not a middle entity to help implement changes, especially if there were no means to do so. For instance, positive messages through media about education mean little to the adolescent girl in the inner city of Los Angeles if her school is of very poor quality, fraught with danger and sexual risk, and graduation from that high school means little for a future possibility of a college education, as a lack of a quality education will block her access. Later she may be charged with prostitution, drug running, or child neglect because of her lack of options, even in the United States. Spending large sums of money for campaigns in China and India to reduce infanticide of female babies or selective gender abortions is only useful if the message sent out through broadcast media makes sense in the world that people inhabit locally, in their own context.

Trying a one-size-fits-all approach for nations or even for neighborhoods in a single city is not always best. Even if an intervention works well in one area and is validated and manualized, the next neighborhood may have another option that has a greater effect on its girls.

One must examine media trends in affected areas for a focused approach such as Viswanth, Ackerson, Sorenson, and Gupta (2010) did while investigating tobacco use messages in traditional broadcast media with the aim to reduce use, but which actually tended to increase tobacco consumption in both men and women. However, it was found that the newspaper alone as a vehicle for the message tended to reduce tobacco use, but in women only. One must keep in mind that while finding a positive outcome in such a study does not mean that one should run for the nearest grant program requesting funds to better solve the issue of tobacco use in girls in India without first thinking through the implications that result if half of the targeted population is illiterate.

Being familiar with cultural norms is essential to build impactful educational campaigns. Chan (2009) found that rural adolescents in China did not hold strong beliefs about the prevalence of affluence in society in the way Western adolescents do. Making an appeal to mainline thinking or popularity in relation to marketing was found not to be very useful. This researcher believes that it is related to the disconnect that those in rural areas feel when a media message does not affect their life in a local, real way. Money can be spent by governments or NGOs to increase positive messages, but if it is not possible for the locals to implement the message in their daily lives through the buy-in of local officials and leaders, lasting change is not possible whether it be in the case of Ms. Feng in China (forced late term abortion by family planning officials) or Mr. Brown (known batterer and singer who continues to be rewarded through fame and fortune, suffering little consequence for his crimes) in the United States.

The Message: Girls Are Not that Valuable

In socioeconomic levels where regular access to online and broadcast media is available, unintended consequences of stealthy advertising campaigns and hidden “cookie gathering” of children’s data only further exacerbate the impact of negative messages to girls by gathering information on them about their potential “weaknesses” in the form of desire and what they search for online (food, beauty, fame) and what they crave to be, or look like in order for corporations to sell to them. And of course, what is sold to them (even in the form of an idea) filters out to their greater society, in the context that they live in. This type of data gathering is one that parents are ill equipped (in all cultures) to fight. Often, television, web-based shows and “free” online games are nothing more than an advertising and data-gathering vehicle for teams, including neuroscientists paid by these corporations to find psychological ways to sell to our youngest consumers.

MTV, in the case of Chris Brown, a known violent abuser, suffered little consequence for his acts—and was in fact, rewarded for criminal behavior through further promotion, record deals, television performance slots, and acclaim. While infanticide or sex selective abortion may seem worlds apart from a first-world, incredibly wealthy domestic abuser who makes music on the television screen, the message going out to girls is consistent. They are not valued in the same way as boys are.

Changing the Filter

In order to make adequate recommendations for change to increase the benefit of media, one must look to its source, its use, and its locale. Media literacy schemes may be seen as a localized plan for significant change, and can certainly be of use. However, its impact will be felt globally by addressing the issue at its source by engaging girls in the creation of media early as a career goal, resulting in lasting transformation, rather than decrying the imbalance in end products and lack of effective public policy.

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