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Gender Representation in Media

Gender Representation: A Fundamental for Using Media Literacy Fundamentals

*“How we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation.” – John Berger, *Ways of Seeing**

The idea of representation is central to media literacy. A key insight of Len Masterman, who brought media literacy to the forefront in the 1970s -1980s as both a field and a pedagogy, was that with media literacy, we do not just study the content of a message or even a particular medium such as television or news or social media. Instead we study representations – the way that subjects are represented and symbolized and packaged by and through a particular medium. As Masterman said in a 2010 [Voices of Media Literacy](#) interview, “...the medium is a window on the world, a transparent glass through which we can see ‘reality’ and judge it for ourselves...Once you accept as a fundamental premise that you are dealing not so much with reflections of reality but with a symbolic system, then a whole set of satellite questions immediately present themselves.”

Learning to challenge and question media representations that we both consume and produce is fundamental to sound media literacy pedagogy. There are an infinite number of subjects that we can address with media literacy, but media literacy skills provide us with a consistent way of processing messages that enhances our ability to communicate and to share ideas.

The representation of gender in media has long been a subject of fascination as well as critical analysis and change management for those advancing and practicing media literacy. Pioneers such as Jean Kilbourne, with videos such as *Killing Us Softly*, and Geena Davis, through her Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media, have brought gender representation to the forefront, and successfully focused attention to the need for change in how women, particularly, are represented in media.

These efforts continue to reinforce the notion that media literacy skills are fundamental: they are the central tools through which to contextualize, acquire and apply content knowledge. Gender representation is an application of these fundamental media literacy skills, which can be applied to any topic, anywhere, anytime to address the symbolic media system that has evolved around the topic of gender in media.

In this issue of *Connections*, we feature two important, ongoing programs which address gender in media: Brazilian-based Promundo, a world-wide nonprofit devoted to promoting gender equality, and the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), produced by the Canadian-based World Association for Christian Communication. Our MediaLit Moments activity asks students to question the reality of selfies.

Research Highlights

Promundo Engages Men as Allies and Advocates for Gender Justice

Founded in Brazil in 1997, Promundo works to promote gender equality and create a world free from violence by engaging men and boys in partnership with women and girls. Promundo is a global consortium with members in the United States, Brazil, Portugal, and Democratic Republic of the Congo that collaborate to achieve this mission.

“Who is the target audience?” “What is included in the message?” “Who and what are omitted?” These questions are fundamental not only to advancing media literacy, but also to promoting gender equality. When it comes to messages that advocate for gender justice, one key audience – which is often overlooked – is men.

Reaching men is a priority for Promundo, a global leader in promoting gender equality and preventing violence by engaging men and boys in partnership with women and girls. Founded in Brazil in 1997, Promundo works with males of all ages to transform harmful gender norms and unequal power dynamics – critical parts of achieving gender equality. Its powerful, participatory communications campaigns – along with its research, programing and advocacy work – empower women and girls. At the same time, men and boys are enabled to recognize that they are allies and advocates in the process of gender equality, and that there are benefits for all when harmful norms are challenged.

Mohara Valle, communications consultant for Promundo in Brazil, stands behind media messaging as a formidable vehicle for social change and gender equality. “Communications and media hold tremendous power to shape attitudes about fatherhood, family life and finding non-violent solutions to conflict,” said Mohara. “When men (and women) repeatedly see positive images that break down gender stereotypes, eventually stigma is reduced and behavior changes. With time, our global society can become a more just place for both men and women, and the next generation will come of age with greater choice, safety and freedom.”

Promundo’s campaigns aim to transform rigid norms about what it means to “be a man” by increasing men’s visibility in child care and family activities, questioning the idea that men should be violent or isolated, and showing the benefits to both women and men when stereotypes about gender are challenged. Taking a positive approach with a strong focus on presenting images of men as caring fathers, loving husbands and positive, non-violent influences in their communities has proven far more effective at engaging and mobilizing men than negative messaging. When images and messaging are aspirational, men are more encouraged to participate, lending their support to gender equality campaigns, taking action to elevate women’s voices and agency, and changing not only their own beliefs related to gender, but also the attitudes and behaviors of men around them.

One of Promundo's many successful initiatives is [MenCare](#), a campaign it co-coordinates globally with the Sonke Gender Justice that includes partner organizations around the world. Since its inception in 2011, MenCare's messages have reached more than 40 countries across five continents. Its purpose is to promote men's equal involvement in caregiving and to highlight the importance of equitable, non-violent parenting practices. Through media such as posters, films and radio, as well as evidence-based programs and targeted advocacy, MenCare engages men, institutions and policymakers to take part in social change activities that lead to greater gender justice. The program is intentionally flexible, so partner organizations can take on any or all parts of the initiative, as well as adapt campaign communications, advocacy priorities, tools, programs and activities to meet cultural and geographical needs.

Through MenCare initiatives, men and women can roll up their sleeves and make change happen through engaging and compelling communications projects. Some partners hold film screenings, create their own public service announcements, adapt and circulate MenCare posters, or develop their own unique visuals to start community-wide conversations about positive fatherhood skills and admirable male role models. MenCare partner organizations also advocate at the local and national level for policies that create more opportunities for men's involvement in caregiving, women's economic empowerment, maternal health, and children's well-being.



For more information, visit: www.promundoglobal.org

Gender Bias in the News: Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP)

We might instinctively detect underrepresentation of women in the news, but the Canadian-based World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) digs in and provides numerical proof that the powerful images, words and sounds we are exposed to every day do not include women equally with men, nor depict women in the same ways.

Since 1995, WACC has produced the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) [report](#) every five years. The report is a comparative, cross-cultural, longitudinal study that works collaboratively with women's rights organizations, grassroots groups, media associations, faith-based/interfaith organizations, university students and researchers across the world. GMMP teams in more than 100 countries contribute to the report by keeping accurate data on gender representation in the news within their countries. The GMMP compiles statistics on the women and men appearing in the news, what roles they play in the stories, how they are presented with regard to, for example, their occupations and family status and how they are spoken of or written about. The project also documents the demographics of the journalists in the stories and the topics they report. Once analyzed, the data provides evidence on gender disparities in news media content and practice, on issues such as marginalization based on gender, objectification and sexualization of women, normalization of violence against women and more. Through coding, all of these issues are crystalized into hard facts. Because of its longevity and accuracy, the GMMP report has become a vital tool to measure global gender representation trends. It also serves as a long-standing tool for change that facilitates media accountability within gender inequality issues.

“The GMMP can be thought of as one giant, global, transnational workshop on media literacy from a gender perspective,” said Sarah Macharia, WACC's manager of gender, poverty and communication. “Tens of thousands of people around the world – from ordinary citizens, to students, to journalists, to academic researchers – come together in one exercise where they apply the same coding instruments to monitor their national and local television, radio, print and online news media. Those who take part in it tell us that they never read the news the same way again.”

One of WACC's partners is WMW-Jamaica (formerly Women's Media Watch). Located in Kingston, Jamaica, WMW is a non-profit organization that uses gender-aware media analysis and transformative action to cultivate gender-equity, justice and violence-free social relations. As the regional coordinator for the Caribbean region and the coordinator for Jamaica, WMW has been a WACC partner since 1995 – the inception of the GMMP. Some of WMW's work includes teaching media literacy through workshops and training events at the community level in Jamaica, particularly through a gender lens. For example, one of WMW's founding members, Hilary Nicholson, teaches a class called “Media, Gender and Development” at the Caribbean School for Media and Communication at the University of the West Indies.

“Along with gathering data for the GMMP report in my region, I use the report in my teaching because it reinforces the importance of media literacy and the power of gender representation in the news,” Hilary said. “The data in the report repeatedly shows us what our region – and the world – needs to work towards in terms of gender equality, reducing stereotypes and reinforcing values that benefit women and men of all ages. The media has a more powerful role in shaping those values than ever before. The truth is young people spend so much time interacting with media and communications today, that it rivals the influence of family and social or faith-based organizations. Ultimately, we need to work together as an international community in approaching media with a perspective of what we want our societies to become in the future.”

When asked how teaching the foundations of media literacy to all children, beginning at the pre-school age would influence their work, Sarah and Hilary concurred.

“That is precisely what we hope the future holds!” Sarah said. “If more people were critically engaged with the media, then perhaps we could accelerate the pace of change. Journalism would have to respond to an audience that demands gender parity. This would expand beyond just the news. It would influence the way we live our lives and relate to each other.”

“The importance of media literacy at the earliest age possible is something WMW has promoted since our inception in 1988,” Hilary said. “Children are taught how to read a book, but information comes from many other sources today. We need to be realistic about where young people get their information and provide them with necessary skills to evaluate it and make the wisest choices in both the media they consume and the content they produce.”

The fifth and most recent GMMP report was released in 2015. Here are some interesting findings and trends that are revealed in the report. These findings are global. Check the [report](#) for information related to specific regions.

- In 2015, women made up only 24% of the persons heard, read about or seen in newspaper, television and radio news, exactly as they did in 2010.
- Underrepresentation of women in news has crossed over into the digital space. Women make up only 26% of the persons heard, read about or seen in online news.
- Younger presenters on screen are predominantly female, but the scales tip dramatically at 50 years old when men begin to dominate the news-anchoring scene.
- Only 4% of stories clearly challenge gender stereotypes, a one percentage point change since 2005.
- Only 37% of stories in newspapers, television and radio newscasts are reported by women.
- The overall proportion of stories focusing on women has held relatively steady at 10% since 2000.

	1995		2000		2005		2010		2015		%Change (t)
	NF	SM	NF	SM	NF	SM	NF	SM	NF	SM	
Main Story Topics: Newspaper, Television, Radio											
Science & Health	27	73	21	79	22	78	33	68	35	65	▲ 6
Social & Legal	19	81	21	79	28	72	30	70	28	72	▲ 9
Crime & Violence	21	79	18	82	22	78	24	76	28	72	▼ 7
Celebrity, Arts & Sport	24	76	23	77	28	72	26	74	23	77	▼ 1
Economy	10	90	18	82	20	80	20	80	21	79	▲ 11
Politics & Government	7	93	12	88	14	86	19	81	16	84	▲ 9
Function in Story											
Personal Experience	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	31	69	36	64	38	62	▲ 7
Populair Opinion			34	66	44	56	37	63	▲ 3		
Eye Witness			30	70	29	71	30	70	0		
Subject			23	77	23	77	26	74	▲ 3		
Spokesperson			14	86	15	85	20	80	▲ 6		
Expert			17	83	20	80	19	81	▲ 2		
% Portrayed as Victim											
Television	29	10	19	7	19	8	18	8	16	8	▼ 5 ▲ 1
Radio			4	8	6	3	8	3			
Newspaper	n/a	n/a	21	4	17	5	19	5	19	5	▼ 2 ▲ 1
% Identified by Family Status											
Television	n/a	n/a	25	11	23	16	26	17	30	23	▲ 5 ▲ 12
Radio			33	35	50	50	52	50	61	61	▲ 28 ▲ 25
% Quoted											
Television	51	49	49	51	53	47	49	51	49	51	▲ 0
Radio			56	44	57	43	52	48	57	43	▲ 1
Newspaper	28	72	31	69	37	63	37	63	37	63	▲ 6
B. Reporting and Presenting the News: Newspaper, Radio, Television											
% Stories presented											
Television	51	49	49	51	53	47	49	51	49	51	▲ 0
Radio			81	19	49	51	45	55	41	59	▲ 0
Newspaper	28	72	31	69	37	63	37	63	37	63	▲ 6
% Stories reported											
Television			36	64	42	58	44	56	38	62	▲ 2
Radio			28	72	40	60	37	63	41	59	▲ 13
Newspaper			26	74	29	71	33	67	35	65	▲ 9
% Stories Reported by Major Topic: Newspaper, radio, television											
Celebrity, Arts & Sport	27	73	35	65	38	62	33	67	▲ 6		
Social & Legal	39	61	40	60	43	57	39	61	▲ 0		
Crime & Violence	29	71	33	67	35	65	33	67	▲ 4		
Science & Health	46	54	38	62	44	56	50	50	▲ 4		
Economy	35	65	43	57	40	60	39	61	▲ 4		
Politics & Government	26	74	32	68	33	67	31	69	▲ 5		
% Female news subjects and sources, by sex of story reporter: Newspaper, radio, television											
Television	n/a	n/a	24	18	25	20	28	22	25	▲ 5 ▲ 8	
Radio											
Newspaper											
C. News Content											
% Stories with Women as a Central Focus: Newspaper, radio, television											
Celebrity, Arts & Sport	n/a	n/a	10	10	10	13	10				
Social & Legal			16	17	16	14					
Crime & Violence			19	17	17	17	▲ 1				
Politics & Government			10	17	16	17	▲ 7				
Science & Health			7	8	7	13	7				
Economy			11	6	11	14	▲ 1				
			4	3	4	5	▲ 1				
% Stories that Challenge Gender Stereotypes: Newspaper, radio, television											
Television	n/a	n/a	3	6	4	▲ 1					
Radio	n/a	n/a	4	6	9	▲ 5					
Newspaper	n/a	n/a	n/a	10	9	▼ 1					
% Stories that Highlight Gender (In)Equality: Newspaper, radio, television											
Television	n/a	n/a	n/a	10	9	▼ 1					
Radio											
Newspaper											

The Global Media Monitoring Project 2015

GMPM is the world's largest and longest-running research and advocacy initiative for gender equality in and through the news media.

Since its inception in 1995, every five years the GMPM has documented changes in relation to gender in news media content.

GMPM 2015 affords an opportunity to assess how far the vision for media gender equality has been achieved over the past two decades, and identify persistent and emerging challenges. The results are based on data gathered by volunteer teams in 114 countries, who monitored 22,136 stories published, broadcast or tweeted by 2,030 distinct media houses, written or presented by 36,000 journalists and containing 65,402 people interviewed and/or subjects of the stories.

Among the key findings, GMPM 2015 reveals that the rate of progress towards media gender parity has almost ground to a halt over the past five years.

HIGHLIGHTS OF FINDINGS



People in the news

In 2015, women make up only 24% of the persons heard, read about or seen in newspaper, television and radio news, exactly as they did in 2010.

The gender gap is narrowest in stories on science and health, the major topic of lowest importance on the news agenda occupying only 8% of the overall news space; women make up 16% of the people in news under this topic, in contrast to only 16% in political news stories. The gap is widest in news about politics and government in which women are only 16% of the people in the stories. In fact, women are three percentage points less visible in political news now than five years ago.

Over the past two decades, the gender gap in people in the news has narrowed most dramatically in Latin America, by an impressive 13 percentage points, from 16% in 1995 to 29% in 2015.

Across the six GMPM function types – or roles in which people appear in the news – the largest stride in closing the gender gap is in people interviewed based on personal experience.

Women comprise 38% of personal experience providers now compared to 31% in 2005. The percentage of women as persons giving testimony based on direct observation has stood still at 30% over the past 10 years. An insignificant two percentage point increase in women as experts was achieved during the period, leading to the current 19% share, almost similar to women's proportion as persons interviewed as spokespersons (20%).

North American news has the highest percentage of experts in the news who are women (23%) followed by the Caribbean (20%) and Latin America (27%).



Find more information: <http://whomakesthenews.org/advocacy/end-news-media-sexism-by-2020>



Commit2MediaLit!

CONSORTIUM
for **MEDIA LITERACY**

Uniting for Development

CML Media Literacy Training with the Museum of Tolerance

The Center for Media Literacy provided media literacy training with an emphasis on Service Learning to 100 public school librarians from the Los Angeles area on November 2, 2017. The training was held at the Museum of Tolerance as part of the museum's Teaching Tolerance program for educators.

Commit2MediaLit! Videos Available

For the second year, CML has sponsored a campaign during Media Literacy Week called Commit2MediaLit! We gather video messages from students, educators, and librarians about the importance of media literacy education in their lives and their communities. Find the videos on our [YouTube channel](#).

About Us...

The Consortium for Media Literacy addresses the role of global media through the advocacy, research and design of media literacy education for youth, educators and parents.

The Consortium focuses on K-12 grade youth and their parents and communities. The research efforts include nutrition and health education, body image/sexuality, safety and responsibility in media by consumers and creators of products. The Consortium is building a body of research, interventions and communication that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for youth.

<http://www.consortiumformedia literacy.org>

Resources for Media Literacy

Resources for Gender Representation in Media

Promundo is a global leader in promoting gender justice and preventing violence by engaging men and boys in partnership with women and girls www.promundoglobal.org.

Global Media Monitoring Program (GMMP) offers free downloadable resources in English, Spanish and French through a campaign called “End News Media Sexism.” Find it [here](#).

[Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media](#). Founded by Academy-Award® winning actor and advocate Geena Davis in 2004. The Institute is the first and only research-based organization working within the media and entertainment industry to engage, educate, and influence content creators, marketers and audiences about the importance of eliminating unconditional bias, highlighting gender balance, challenging stereotypes, creating role models and scripting a wide variety of strong female characters in entertainment and media that targets and influences children ages 11 and under.

Jean Kilbourne's award-winning [Killing Us Softly](#) series shows how the advertising industry continues to reinforce, and glamorize, a regressive and debased notion of femininity.

[The Ugly Business of Beauty Apps](#) with Amanda Hess of the New York Times explains the apps now available for altering facial and body features in photos.

CML's [Global OnRamp Resources](#) are free media literacy materials for introducing CML's educational framework for media literacy. Available in a variety of languages. Also find research and articles related to gender representation on our website www.medialit.org.

Med!aLit Moments

Selfie Fix-ation

Did you know the word *selfie* is now in the dictionary? Per Merriam-Webster online, it means: *an image of oneself taken by oneself using a digital camera especially for posting on social networks*. When it comes to posting images online, we all know about cropping and filters, but what might come as a surprise is that there are apps designed to alter selfies by “fixing” facial and/or body features. These apps promote the notion that a natural look is not pretty enough and contribute to unrealistic standards for beauty.

Ask students if an altered selfie is still a selfie?

AHA! Some selfies are not real.

Grade: 7-12

Key Question #1: Who created this message?

Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed.

Key Question #2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

Key Question #4: What values, lifestyles, points of view are included or omitted in this message?

Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view.

Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

Materials: Video from Amanda Hess, The New York Times, *The Ugly Business of Beauty Apps*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bch1xd7prs>

Activity: Ask students to pair up and talk about their social media habits. Do they post selfies? Do they alter their selfies? Do they think celebrities alter their selfies? If so, why? What do they think when they see a digitally altered selfie? Why do people post selfies in the first place? Is an altered selfie still a selfie?

Show [The Ugly Business of Beauty Apps](#) video and continue the discussion. Ask a few students to share their thoughts with the class as they address the Key Questions/Core Concepts of media literacy.

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy's MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, © 2002-2017, Center for Media Literacy, <http://www.medialit.com>