# Cinema and Society:
## Shaping our Worldview Beyond the Lens

Investigation on the Impact
of Gender Representation
in Indian Films

*If she can see it, she can be it*™

**Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media**

**OAK FOUNDATION**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

We address three primary questions in this research. First, how do people of different backgrounds in India view gender representations in entertainment media? Secondly, what influence does entertainment media have on the lives of people in India? Lastly, should entertainment media address pressing social issues of the day? This study fills a gap in existing research on media effects. Previous studies have documented gender bias in Indian media and media effects, but our study is the first to ask everyday Indians what they think about media content, and whether they think it influences how people live.

The focus on gender in this study is part of a growing global emphasis on gender inequality. Around the world, gender gaps persist in health, finance, education, and politics that impede economic growth and social progress.[1] Despite a push by the United Nations to champion gender equality, progress remains stagnant in media content worldwide. Gender representation in entertainment media matters. Previous research indicates that while media does not tell people what to think, it does tell us what to think about and how to think about it.[2] Media influences what issues people focus on[3] and what options they think are available for social change.[4] Media content and influence vary depending upon the cultural settings and the socio-political environment, but no country to date has achieved political, social, or economic gender parity.[5]

Few studies have been conducted on media effects in India, and those that exist find that media consumption leads to more progressive attitudes toward women[6] and greater awareness of social issues.[7] A study conducted by Dr. Ratan Mani Lal and colleagues finds that even though India is rapidly expanding its global reach as a knowledge-based economy, the positive influence of mass media on societal values is limited by poverty and adherence to traditional values.[8] Despite these limitations, Dr. Bala Lakhendra finds that entertainment media in India is still influential in altering traditional cultural beliefs and behaviors.[9] Our study is the first to measure Indians' perceptions of media influence in their lives.

In our groundbreaking 2014 research study Gender Bias Without Borders,[10] we analyzed gender representations in popular film in ten countries and found that women remain underrepresented. When women are featured, their characters tend to reinforce harmful gender stereotypes. Women have made noticeable strides in Indian entertainment media in recent years, as evidenced by the success of films
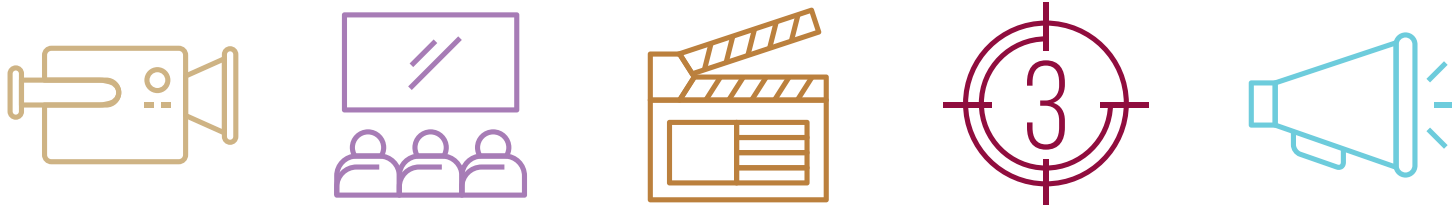
featuring women. Kangana Ranaut's "*Tanu Weds Manu Returns*" is the first female-led Bollywood film to earn over Rs100 crore. Anushka Sharma's "*NH10*" and Deepika Padukone's "*Piku*" also did well at the Indian box office. However, women remain underrepresented in all roles in the Indian film industry. The gender ratio in India's film industry stands at 6.2 males to every female, and only one-in-ten film directors (9.1%) are women. The lack of women in key film industry positions in India translates into gender gaps in film content.

Female characters in Indian films comprise only 24.9% of the total, and none of the top ten highest grossing films in 2014 featured a female lead or co-lead. When women do appear in films, they are rarely shown in powerful positions. Fewer than 15% of all roles in Indian films depict women as business executives, political figures, or science, technology, engineering, and math professionals. Instead, female characters are commonly presented in gendered occupations such as nurses and teachers, and as wives and mothers.

When women are represented in Indian films, they are also hyper-sexualized. Indian women are three times more likely than men to be portrayed with some nudity (35% compared to 13.5%). They are also three times more likely to appear in revealing clothing than men (34.1% compared to 12.2%). Reported cases of eating disorders have increased over five times since 1990 as Indian media has become more Westernized, and previous research has linked this to unattainable standards of beauty put forth in entertainment media.[11]

For this study, we build upon our 2014 quantitative analysis to explore the impact of media in India in greater depth. We analyze how Indians of different backgrounds perceive the content of entertainment media, and how they believe it affects their lives. We asked boys, girls, men, and women, in their own words, who their role models are within the entertainment world and why they look up to these people – what is it about their behavior, qualities, lifestyle and attitude they admire? How is this reflected in their own lives, attitudes, and behavior? We honed in on specific scenes from movies to ask how participants relate to the characters and the situation, and whether this reflects normal life in their country. We also asked participants about their perceptions of how men and women are depicted in entertainment media and whether media should address pressing social issues.

The findings from this qualitative study, combined with the 2014 quantitative analysis of media content, provide an illuminating picture of the state of film and television in India and its influence on the lives of Indian people.

# STUDY METHODOLOGY

We used focus groups as the primary methodology for exploring our questions. Qualitative focus groups allow for deeper insight into research questions than quantitative survey research because they employ open-ended questions in a group setting where participants can interact with one another. Researchers pose the same questions to each focus group, but participants often take the discussion in new directions that furnish a deeper exploration of the research questions.

For this study, ten focus groups were conducted over the course of three days in September 2014 in a hotel in Ahmedabad, India. The conversations were conducted in Hindi, then translated into English. The focus groups were conducted in Ahmedabad instead of in Mumbai (India's largest city) to get a more accurate understanding of Indian filmgoers' perspectives in a medium-sized city with less Western influence.

Each focus group was led by a professionally trained moderator. Moderators were matched by gender for each group to control for potential gender moderator effects. The male moderator had 13 years of experience as a market and social science researcher and the female moderator had four years experience as a research professional.

Each of the ten focus groups included eight participants. Half of the focus groups included only male participants, while the other half included only female participants. They were selected by age group, gender, and parental status in order to compare the perceptions of different groups. The following focus groups were recruited for this study:

| CHILDREN | TEENS | YOUNG ADULTS | ADULTS | PARENTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Girls, ages 9 – 11 | Teen girls, ages 13 – 16 | Women, ages 18 – 24 | Women, ages 30 – 44 | Mothers of children ages 6 – 9 |
| Boys, ages 9 – 11 | Teen boys, ages 13 – 16 | Men, ages 18 – 24 | Men, ages 30 – 44 | Fathers of children ages 6 – 9 |

We attempted to create focus groups that represent the diversity of urban residents in India in terms of ethnicity, education, and income levels, but this proved to be tremendously challenging. We were not able to locate Indian participants from lower castes who had viewed movies in the past year and could take time to participate in a focus group. Because of this constraint, the focus groups were comprised of mostly middle-class, educated Indians who were fluent in both Gujarati and Hindi. There was some religious diversity among the groups, with both Hindus and Muslims participating. It should be noted that in addition to the two parent focus groups, all of the participants in the 30–to–44–year–old focus groups were also parents. In India, it is difficult to find men and women in this age range who do not have children.

Focus group participants only included Indians who frequently go to movies and watch television. They self-identified as people who had viewed between one and five Hindi films in the previous twelve months. Participants were also screened for their level of comfort discussing the personal impact of their most recent movie viewing experience to ensure that they would be active contributors in their focus group. People who work in media or market research were excluded from the study given their professional proximity to the research question.

Each focus group started with background questions to get the group talking. Next, the moderators asked about societal gender roles and how they are represented in media. Participants were shown two short clips of scenes from films (“*Rockstar*” and “*Bumm Bumm Bole*”) to spark discussions of gender roles. The scene from “*Rockstar*” shows the leading lady sneaking into a movie disguised as a man. The scene from “*Bumm Bumm Bole*” portrays family dynamics with a stern, hard working father, a mother who tries to shield her son from his aggressive father, and a daughter who dutifully helps around the house. These films were selected based on their clear depiction of gender roles. Participants were also asked a series of direct questions about media influence and social issues in entertainment media. The moderators' script can be found in Appendix A.

This study has several limitations. The first limitation is its focus on film/television instead of a full array of entertainment media (e.g., video games, online videos, books, magazines, etc.). Focus group participants discussed many other forms of media, but they were only asked specific questions about film and television, so the findings can only be applied to those mediums.

A second limitation is that a study with 80 focus group participants, by definition, over-simplifies the opinions of the 1.2 billion ethnically, racially, religiously, linguistically, and culturally diverse people who reside in India. India is also one of the world's most linguistically, culturally, and religiously diverse countries, with approximately 2,000 castes, numerous tribes and sects, all major religions represented, and over 100 different spoken languages. With only about 32% of the population living in urban areas,[13] and with such diversity of income and language, access to films, television, and the Internet varies throughout the country.

Additionally, any study involving gender is complicated by a 2014 Indian Supreme Court ruling that legally recognized a "*third gender*,"[14] a term for transgender individuals or for anyone not conforming to gender binaries. In a time when Indian society has begun to recognize that gender binaries do not tell the whole story of how people identify themselves, our study uses a more conventional gender binary (female and male) and does not include Indians who are "*third gender.*"

Another study limitation is that some focus group participants may engage in what is called social desirability, a tendency for participants to respond to questions in a manner that reflects desirable or "good" behavior. Although moderators did their best to minimize this phenomenon, some participants may have given socially desirable answers instead of their honest opinions in order to avoid the appearance of sexism.

# INDIAN MEDIA

India produces more films than any other country in the world. The Indian film industry is actually many different film industries with different languages, including Hindi ("Bollywood"), Tamil ("Kollywood"), Telugu, Bengali, and Kannada. Combining these different genres, over 1,000 films are produced in India each year. Films from India are widely viewed within the country and across the globe.

Despite the massive size of the Indian film industry, fewer than 4% of Indians regularly go to the movies due to cost, access, and safety issues.[15] The cost of seeing a film in the theater has gone up in recent decades and many families cannot afford this entertainment luxury. Additionally, viewers who live in small towns and villages often do not have access to movie theaters. India has fewer movie screens per capita than most other industrialized nations.[16] For example, there are approximately 13,000 movie theaters in India compared to 40,000 theaters in the United States, a country with only one quarter of India's population.[17] Additionally, far fewer women than men attend the cinema in India due to safety concerns. This means the Indian film industries are losing profits because some female filmgoers do not feel safe.

Indians spend more time watching films on television than going to the cinema. Nine-in-ten Indians have televisions in their homes[18] and most households with TV also have cable television. Films are shown on Indian television only a few months after they are released, so many people wait to view films at home. Many parents prefer TV viewing to film viewing for their children because strict national laws require television stations to edit out sexual scenes, dialogue, and excessive violence.

Indians are increasingly using Internet devices to access entertainment media. India has 243 million Internet users,[19] a figure that is low for India's population of 1.2 billion, but Internet use is rapidly rising. Most Indians access the Internet exclusively through mobile devices and the average Indian spends five hours a day on social media. An increasing number of young people in India have access to cell phones and other handheld devices, but broadband makes it difficult to stream online television programs and movies.
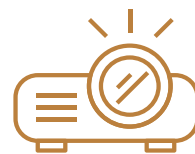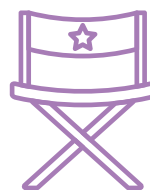
# FINDINGS

We report our major findings from the ten focus groups in this section. Participants were asked numerous questions, but three primary themes emerged during focus group discussions:

- **Media Influence**
- **Media Preferences**
- **Social Issues in Media**

For each of the three themes, we describe the most common opinions and verbatim quotes from focus group participants. We only include findings that surfaced in half or more of the ten groups, and we highlight disagreements or differences of opinion within and across groups.

## Media Influence: Powerful Teaching Tool

Focus group participants were asked whether gender roles have changed compared to the past. Their opinions and discussions provided some interesting findings about this complex issue.

### FINDING: Media Shapes Attitudes and Behaviors

Participants across focus groups are in agreement that entertainment media has great influence when it comes to the attitudes and behaviors of everyday Indians. They notice that people imitate the styles, attitudes, and behaviors they see in film and television. Adult participants notice that films and television are especially influential with children.

*"Women and men have equal jobs, equal roles."* – Jamie, age 14

*"Whoever has seen whatever movie, he will wonder if he should do that also."* – Dixit, age 24

*"Now people imitate the bike racing style they have seen in the movies. People also copy the fashion, clothes, and attitudes from movies."* – Vandana, age 35

*"It affects the mind of children. It also affects our society and culture."* – Maneesha, age 30

*"Children are deeply affected by these characters and movies as they immediately start copying it after watching them."* – Pinky, age 38
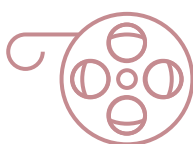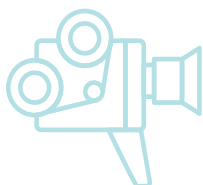
Many participants say that television has a bigger impact on the lives of Indians than films because TV is more widely accessible and people watch television more often.

*"It would have a lot of impact in our lives... because we watch a lot of TV" – Kusum, age 33*

*"Yes, as compared to movies, TV would have more impact on us." – Rajvindeer, age 35*

When asked how media influences people, participants present mixed effects. On the positive side, participants say that media promotes acts of kindness and serves as a catalyst for changing women's lives. On the negative side, participants think that entertainment media encourages bad habits and is disruptive to traditional values. We address each of these media impacts in turn.

### FINDING: Media Shapes Women's Lives

Across the board, participants agree that gender roles are affected by how men and women are depicted in films. More specifically, they report that media has radically altered women's lives in India by raising awareness about issues with the dowry system, sexual violence, and child marriages.

*"They would have good effect... see, in our times, dowry system was common. But, now there is no such evil. That is because of the impact of media." – Bhanu, age 35*

*"Because of media showing about rapes, because of awareness about such issues, these incidences would get reduced." – Dhara, age 32*

*"They have stopped the practice of child marriages also. That is the impact of TV." – Trupti, age 34*

Viewers of all ages say they are inspired by films that show more equality between men and women and portray women in successful jobs. Female participants in particular offered many examples of films and characters that have positively influenced their life choices and career aspirations. Participants linked increasing freedom for women directly to media representations of women.

*"Serial, TV shows. Girls can even fly planes." – Jaimin, age 14*

*"See, boys and girls, both can do jobs." – Trishna, age 11*

*"Girls are ahead of boys now; we do not differentiate between boys and girls." – Parth, age 19*

*"In lots of serials and in real life, it is seen that girls have progressed further than boys in some areas. And even now, families are expecting the same thing for their girl as they expect for their boy." – Maheshbhai, age 40*

Indian viewers attribute increasing rates of female education in the country to the influence of media showing girls and women in more professional roles. According to participants, educated women in the "reel" world leads to more educated women in the real world.

*"See, in past, daughters were not educated much. Our parents didn't have any expectations from us."* – Dhara, age 32

*"Now, they are educating the girls… now, the girls are also demanding that they should be given good education."* – Alka, age 38

Some viewers credit the changing depictions of women in movies with helping them see themselves in a different light. In particular, women cited Rani Mukerji in "*Mardaani*" (a 2014 Bollywood film about a female crime branch officer who investigates child trafficking) and Priyanka Chopra in "*Mary Kom*" (a 2014 biographical sports drama about a five-time female world boxing champion). These are examples of films that show girls taking on challenges and pushing their limits in order to succeed.

*"I like movies like 'Mardaani' with Rani Mukerji and 'Mary Kom' with Priyanka Chopra. They teach girls to be strong and always face the challenges in life."* – Shefali, age 20

*"Priyanka Chopra is the star in the movie 'Mary Kom.' Her character provides inspiration. The girl faced lots of challenges in her life. But, finally, she could succeed."* – Deepika, age 22

*"In 'Mary Kom,' she is a boxer, she has to struggle a lot to come up in sports. Even though she is a woman, even though she has children, she attains success in life."* – Bhanu, age 35
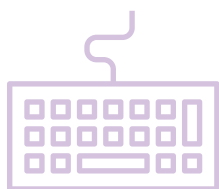
Adult focus group participants see that men are more likely than women to play the hero in films and are more often shown as professionals or in positions of power. They notice that women mostly appear in supporting roles. Participants of all ages say they like to see female characters doing many different things, including taking care of their family, respecting their elders, working in professional positions, serving the poor and needy, and treating people well in general.

Participants were able to identify gender differences in a scene from the film "Bumm Bumm Bole" that shows a stern father interacting with his son and daughter. One thing that struck viewers was that the daughter was working on household chores while the son was eating, playing, and studying. Participants say this reflects real life where, despite progress in recent years, the education of boys in India is still prioritized over the education of girls. Some participants were concerned that the girl was being forced to perform child labor in the scene.

*"They show that the girl knows what she has to do. Even though the boy is scolded, he is not made to do such work. They show the difference between boy and girl. The girl is asked to prepare tea, to give sugar." – Hitesh, age 31*

*"In this scene the girl was asked to do homework when she was doing study. That is wrong because boys and girls have equal rights to study and also to work." – Suman, age 35*

Some focus group participants are also concerned that media is a disruptive influence on traditional societal gender roles. They think that sexual content and scenes with strong-willed women should not be shown, out of fear that girls and women will imitate this in real life.

*"See, nowadays, girls are also bold, they smoke, they drink, they drive bullet also. Now, girls also want to do everything which a boy is doing." – Umeshbhai, age 42*

*"Nowadays, girls are doing such things… we are watching these things being done now in open. Such boys, girls don't feel ashamed of anybody." – Kusum, age 33*

Participants were also shown a scene from the film "Rockstar" in which the female protagonist dresses up as a male in order to go with a man to a movie that shows sexually suggestive scenes. Participant reaction to her behavior was mixed. Teenage girls like the scene because it shows the female lead living her life as she wishes, knowing that when she gets married she will not be as free to do so. In comparison, other participants of all ages felt she was too bold and could get hurt. Participants criticized the female protagonist for speaking so boldly and lying to her parents. They also labeled her "dirty" for going in to see a "dirty" movie. Parents say they are concerned that children watching "Rockstar" might copy this behavior. Participants across groups say the protagonist would face sexual violence if she tried to attend the movie on her own in real life.

> "The way she speaks isn't nice." – Jaimin, age 9
>
> "She shouldn't have lied." – Somya Singh, age 14
>
> "She was dirty minded." – Vabhavni, age 16
>
> "Even the theatre was not in a nice location; it was a bad place, it was unsafe. Why does he say it is dangerous to go for the movie? Because the entire area was unsafe, boys would not respect girls." – Jaimin, age 14
>
> "See, nowadays, the girls are equal to boys in certain aspects. In certain aspects, they are more forward even. But, for certain aspects, there would be restrictions on the girl. If she wants to watch such movie, she would have to go there as a boy. If she had gone to watch the movie as a girl, she would have been raped." – Ilesh, age 39

## Media Preferences: Family Values Matter

In this section, we summarize focus group participants' media preferences. Participants were asked a series of questions about their favorite films, television programs, and characters in order to determine their preferred media content. Participants favor entertainment media that shows loving family arrangements. They do not like sexually suggestive or violent content, even though this content is on the rise. We explore each of these themes in turn.

### FINDING: Focus on the Family

When asked about their favorite films and television programs, participants across groups express a preference for Indian-made media. Frequently mentioned were Indian blockbuster films such as "*Singham Returns*," "*Kick*," "*Entertainment*," and "*Mary Kom*." When asked what they like about their favorite films, participants say they like the action sequences, learning about history and current affairs, learning moral lessons, good comedy, heroic acts, and characters that are determined in the face of obstacles. Participants particularly like portrayals of loving families and strong friendships in entertainment media.

*"We want to see movies that educate our children about how to respect family, how to stay in the family, and how to be a good man"* – Kusum, age 33

*"It can be watched with the whole family because it shows respect toward her father and how nicely the wife treats her husband."* – Rushil, age 13

*"Family movies teach us how we can be a good daughter-in-law."* – Pushpa, age 42

*"In family serials, we can learn how to stay in joint families and how to manage and behave with each other."* – Arzoo, age 20

**FINDING: Keep Media Content "Clean"**

Participants of all ages say that children should not be allowed to watch "dirty" films or television programs that include bad language, violence, sexual content, being disrespectful, smoking, drinking, or stealing. This theme came up in every focus group. Participants are especially concerned because they think that "dirty" content is becoming increasingly common in Indian entertainment media.

> *"They fire guns, guy teases and harasses a girl, they use slang. Our parents don't allow us to watch all this."* – Parth, age 13
>
> *"Our parents think that we will also learn all this. Bad manners and bad morals, like if any movie has slang, they think we will learn this as well."* – Prashanth, age 13
>
> *"The movie has bad scenes; it is not good for children."* – Chaitali, age 14

Adult participants say they do not allow their children to watch media content that has cursing or sexually suggestive language, violence, or sexual content, and they do not think this content is good for Indian society because it diminishes respect in the family.

> *"It should not have lot of violence, action."* – Akash, age 33
>
> *"Even movies of Tushar Kapoor [an Indian actor] are not suitable. They have dialogue with double meaning."* – Jasveer, age 32
>
> *"Sexuality is real...but we tend to hide it, we don't bring it out in the open."* – Pushpa, age 42
>
> *"We like to watch romantic scenes but we don't like to watch adult [sex] scenes."*
> – Shantaben, age 35
>
> *"In our culture, sexuality is to be kept hidden."* – Mahesh, age 30
>
> *"We have to maintain respect. We have to maintain decency in the family."*
> – Umeshbhai, age 42

Some of the adult participants say they prefer older films and television programs because newer media is less modest and traditional.

> "There is huge difference between old and new movies as in the old movie heroines do not wear revealing clothing like heroines wear now in the movies." – Kailas, age 32

> "In old movies, there are no adult scenes shown, but nowadays, adult scenes are common for any movie." – Shantaben, age 35

## Social Issues in Media: Catalyst for Change

In our focus group discussions, Indian viewers of all ages talked about the social issues they face in everyday life – from economic hardships to violence. One young boy reported being afraid of getting kidnapped if he went alone to the market. Several teen boys spoke about being beaten by their parents or uncles when they make mistakes, fight with their siblings, or look at girls inappropriately. Teen girls spoke about child brides, infanticide, and the difficulties poorer people face meeting basic needs and going to school. Young women spoke about the dangers of going out in public by themselves, the need to please their in-laws once they are married, and the social imperative to marry.

In this section, we summarize participant opinions about whether entertainment media should address social issues. Participants of all ages said they appreciate films that tackle real social problems, inspire people to think differently (on the subject of child brides, for instance), and raise their awareness. Participants were specially asked about violence against women and child abuse. We address each of these topics in turn.

**FINDING: Violence Against Women**

Participants say that Indian women are constrained in everyday life by the threat of sexual violence. Men can be out at night, but women cannot, especially when alone, for fear that they will be raped.

> *"The freedom which is available to the boys, it is not available to the girls. Boys can roam around any place."* – Rohit, age 35
>
> *"When the girl is grown up, she cannot stay out late hours, whereas men can easily do this. Parents would not object to the sons."* –Mahesh, age 30
>
> *"We cannot stay out late at night from our house as we are women."* – Pinky, age 38
>
> *"If girl is outside alone, then we get tense about her safety."* – Jignesh, age 30
>
> *"It is shown that how females are having problems in standing or sitting in certain places like bus where boy surrounded by her and try to touch her."* – Kirit, age 30
>
> *"In my opinion, females cannot take up jobs which are done at night, like work in call centers. See, it may be safe, but they should not take up such jobs just in case."* – Mahesh, age 30

Participants are concerned about how violence against women is depicted in films and television. They think that media depictions of rape and acid attacks have inspired some of these acts in real life. Some participants point out that if the violence is shown with no negative repercussions, it can encourage real violence.

> *"We don't like seeing it. It doesn't feel nice."* – Prashanth, age 13
>
> *"Incidents of rape are increasing in society now. This is because of the effect of movies."* – Rupa, age 43
>
> *"In 'Damini,' they show that she is raped by the entire gang. In Gujarat, there has been a real iincident like this. See, from the movie, they got the idea for gang rape."* –Rohit, age 35
>
> *"Gang rapes used to happen in old movies, and from there it crept into the real world."* – Dixit, age 24
>
> *"In Ajay Devgan's 'Gangaajal,' there's a scene where a girl is attacked by acid. After the release of movie, such incidences of acid throwing on girls actually increased."* – Hitesh, age 31
>
> *"'Gangaajal' showed that if a girl refused to accept the wishes of the men, they would throw acid on her face, on her eyes. After that, the government had to ban such acid because such attacks had increased in reality."* – Jasveer, age 32

Many participants across age groups also talked about the power of media to raise awareness about violence against women in order to tackle this social problem.

> "There are some television shows like 'Savdhaan India' in which they show real cases of child kidnapping and violence against woman violence. They also give a website and ways to be aware of this crime." – Pinky, age 38

> "Like they tell us that in 'Savdhaan India.' There was a rape attempt on a girl and she fought for her rights. We learned to not back out and not be pushed around. We should fight for ourselves and we should set an example so people can learn." – Heeral, age 21

> "In our times, we would have kept silent [about being sexually harassed by men]. But today, girls have got courage because of movies. Now, they can face the situation." –Alka, age 38

> "Such scenes have some advantages also, when the end turns out positive. Like, in 'Mehndi,' they show that Rani Mukerji has to suffer a lot. But, at the end, she is fine. In 'Damini' also, they show this. She was raped, and she suffers a lot, but she fights till the end. At the end, she gets support. Such movies give us the message that we should not tolerate such violence." – Rupa, age 43

> "Movies about violence against women inspire us to be bold and raise our voices against violence." – Praja, age 20
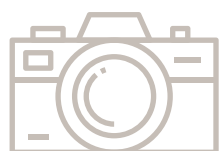
**FINDING: Child Abuse and Mistreatment**

Participants are mixed on whether child abuse and mistreatment should be shown in entertainment media. Some participants across focus groups think that violence against children should not be shown in films because it will negatively influence people, especially children.

*"In real life, people are facing a lot of negativity. In the programs, you should show something which is positive." – Jasveer, age 32*

*"At this age I don't think they should watch all this because they have really delicate minds. They accept and soak in things faster." – Farah, age 20*

*"If they show such content, the awareness may not increase, but such crimes would increase." – Saleem, age 44*

In contrast, most participants think that entertainment media can be used to educate society about the ill effects of child abuse and child labor. They believe that media can inspire bystanders to speak up, perpetrators to change, and victims to protect themselves.

*If she can see it, she can be it™*

"We learn [that child labor is wrong] from these serials." – Prem, age 11

"Yes, people are more aware by watching these movies." – Nikita, age 20

"See, only if we see such violence, we would come to know that such violence exists in the world." – Alka, age 38

"Yes, the people who do child labor, they will want to stop." – Boomhi, age 19

"People will learn that parents who do this to their children, they shouldn't do all this." – Priyanka, age 18

"They show such violence, but the end of such stories should be positive so it is appropriate to show such violence in movies." – Rajvindeer, age 35

"Yes, they should show such social issues. It would give a message to the children." – Dhara, age 32

"We would be teaching our children about their safety... but it is better if they learn these things from the movies. When they watch such incidences in movies, they would become more alert about the problem." – Alka, age 38

"They also tell how to protect yourself." – Priyanka, age 18

Beyond violence against women and child abuse, participants agree that social issues are important to show in entertainment in order to raise awareness of problems and offer solutions. They specifically mentioned programs that raise awareness about cyber-crimes, cancer, HIV/AIDS, healthy lifestyles, and child marriages.

## CONCLUSION

Focus group discussions centered on the three primary themes of media influence, media preferences, and the depiction of social issues in media. We summarize the major findings for each theme below.

### Media Influence: Powerful Teaching Tool

Participants agree that entertainment media has great influence when it comes to the attitudes and behaviors of everyday Indians, especially children. Participants think television has a bigger impact because it is more widely accessible and watched more often.

When asked how media influences people, participants find the influence to be both positive and negative. On the positive side, Indian viewers prefer movies and television programs that uphold moral values and teach kindness.

Many participants like the role of media in raising awareness about the importance of educating girls and the gendered social problems of the dowry system, sexual violence, and child marriages. Viewers of all ages say they are inspired by films that show more equality between men and women and portray women in successful jobs. Female participants in particular offered many examples of films and characters that have influenced their activities and career aspirations. Some viewers credit the changing depictions of women in movies with helping them see themselves in a different light.

### Media Preferences: Family Values Matter

Participants across the board are critical of sexually suggestive and violent content. Participants of all ages say that children should not be allowed to watch "dirty" films or television programs that include bad language, violence, or sexual content. Viewers report that "dirty" content is becoming increasingly common in film and television in India. Instead, they prefer content with a strong moral story, comedies, and storylines depicting loving families and strong friendships.

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## Social Issues in Media: Catalyst for Change

Participants were divided on whether entertainment media should depict violence against women. On one side, participants are concerned that showing rape and acid attacks in film and television will inspire these acts in real life. On the other side, many participants see media as a vital tool to raise awareness about gender violence.

Participants are similarly mixed on whether child abuse/mistreatment should be shown in entertainment media. Some participants across focus groups think that violence against children should not be shown in entertainment media because it will negatively influence people, especially children. In contrast, most participants think that entertainment media can be used to educate society about the ill effects of child abuse and child labor. They believe that media can inspire bystanders to speak up, perpetrators to change, and victims to protect themselves.

Participants agree that social issues are important to show in entertainment in order to raise awareness of problems and offer solutions. They would like to see more content on cyber-crimes, cancer, HIV/AIDS, healthy lifestyles, and child marriages.

# INTERVENTIONS

These interventions were prepared by Professor Anjali Monteiro and Professor K.P. Jayasankar, School of Media and Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India.

India is a populous nation, with great diversity in terms of language, cultural practices, class, caste, region (e.g. urban-rural), and religious identities and inequalities, all of which impinge on media consumption, influence, and perceptions of the media, as well as gender roles, relations of power, and socialisation practices. Further, the media in India is complexly structured, with a tendency towards oligopolistic practices, given growing cross media ownership. While India is a democratic nation, with a vibrant civil society and an elected government, recent times have seen a growing right-wing fundamentalist political influence, which has had serious repercussions for gender equality and freedom of expression. It is in this context that the following interventions are suggested. They attempt to reach multiple stakeholders within the media, civil society, and the state:

## Media Industry

The focus group discussions (FGDs) bear witness to a predominance of conservative and traditional views, across genders, particularly around women's presence in public space, which is often couched in the language of safety. On a larger social scale, this often manifests in moral panics and mob violence (by right-wing political groups) directed against women's presence in public space (e.g. women in pubs or restaurants) as well as the phenomenon of victim blaming in the case of violence against women. The media can play an important role in addressing these restrictions on the mobility of women in various ways. First, they can present women in more positive, active roles that emphasize their presence and contribution to the public sphere. Secondly, they can give visibility to the struggles and demands of the various women's movements in the country by presenting stories that bring out, in an empathetic manner, these struggles and dilemmas, avoiding simplistic representations that paint a black and white picture of gender roles, norms, and ideals.

While the FGD participants were concerned with the abnormal (violence, crime, obscenity), we feel that what is more insidious and passes unnoticed is the construction of the normal—the subtle and not so subtle ways in which patriarchal relations of power are reinforced and normalised in everyday life. It is hence important for the media in general and the entertainment media in particular to create programming that poses challenges to patriarchy, through questioning the 'normal.' For instance, why should the household and childcare be solely women's responsibility? Why should only male children inherit property and so on?

In order to orient media houses towards such representations that have the potential to create dialogue around gender roles and stereotypes, workshops that bring together diverse sections—feminists, media producers, writers and other stakeholders—would generate new ideas that could shift gender representations in popular media. Forums that make ongoing dialogue and consultation between these groups possible would contribute towards more thoughtful and wholesome gender representations.

Often, gender-sensitive representations in the media are in fact hegemonic representations of upper class and caste women. There is a need to adopt an intersectional approach to media initiatives that address the ways in which different inequalities emergently interweave with each other. Further, this requires a diversity of platforms for dissemination as well as gendered representations. An intersectional approach that problematizes gender, class, and caste at once is the need of the hour.

Inseparable from issues of gender sensitivity are LGBTQIA issues. In the Indian context in particular, there is a need to critically interrogate media representations of sexual minorities, given the processes of exclusions at work, legal, cultural, and social.

There are already organisations that have initiated awards for gender-sensitive media content (e.g. the Laadli Media and Advertising Awards, an initiative of Population First). There should be many more such initiatives that encourage and promote responsible entertainment programming that is sensitive to gender concerns.

Very often, such initiatives towards gender sensitisation tend to be restricted to the English-language media. Given that the Hindi and various vernacular media reach larger viewer/readership at a grassroots level, special efforts should be made to reach such groups.

Organisations of women media professionals, such as Network of Women in Media (NWMI) and International Association of Women in Radio and Television (IAWRT), should be involved in designing and implementing such initiatives.

Gender sensitisation modules should be produced for use within professional media teaching/training educational institutions, covering the entire gamut of media (print/broadcast/Internet).

**Advertising and Marketing Communication**

Advertising and brand communications have a powerful role in influencing attitudes and behavior in terms of the images pushed out into culture. Equally, given the broadcast and reach of such communication, many consider the industry has not just permission but also a responsibility to influence culture. Brand advertisers and marketers are also ideally placed as an industry to enact change rapidly given the relatively short production process – in contrast to say TV shows, games or film.

Few brand advertisers will be ignorant of the fact that women account for over two thirds of all consumer spend globally. According to Ernst & Young, women are set to be the largest global 'emerging market,' highlighting the importance of engaging this powerful audience.

There is an increasing awareness for the issue of brands promoting traditional gender stereotypes. Global companies such as Unilever are working towards a commitment to move away from such stereotypes, perhaps unsurprisingly given that only 9% of women feel that marketers are reaching them effectively.[1]

J Walter Thompson, through its research on "Female Tribes," is vocal within the industry to promote the importance and significance of women and their diversity – dramatizing the way in which the de facto classification of women as "Busy working Moms" is redundant, and driving brand narratives that truly reflect women's status within society. This research highlights the fact that, on the one hand, 76% of women globally perceive it's never been a better time to be a woman and 92% of Indian women feel their femininity is a strength not a weakness. Whilst globally, 56% of women feel that they are more ambitious than their spouse – this spikes to 69% for women in India – and 73% of Indian women claim to make the majority of financial decisions in the household.[2] However, popular culture still has some way to catch up and reflect women's new cultural and economic status: 87% of women in India – the second highest figure for any country in the survey – wanted women to have a stronger voice when it comes to cultural influence. However, Indian women were among the most likely to feel that technology had empowered them (92%) and given them a voice (90%) perhaps otherwise excluded from culture.

J Walter Thompson's proprietary study "The Women's Index" highlights the persuasive power of the moving image, not just in shaping women's career aspirations, but their life decisions. The global study revealed that 58% of women said that strong onscreen female role models inspired them to be either more ambitious or more assertive, and more than one in ten women in India were inspired to leave an abusive relationship purely through the influence of onscreen female role models. For a country still blighted by violence against women, this serves to underline the significant and persuasive power of the moving image: it doesn't just sell products it can change lives.

Engaging women as a diverse and powerful audiences, not only has the power to change lives but pragmatically creates a more sustainable business model for brands.

A   Insights in Marketing 2012
B   JWT Women's Index 2015
C   JWT Women's Index 2015

## Civil Society

In India, most state and civil society responses to "undesirable" media content tend to take the form of demanding and imposing bans, which are neither desirable nor feasible, in the present Internet-driven scenario. Instead, the focus should shift from censorship to media education, discussion, and debate. A viewership that demands gender-sensitive media content is a better way to shape programming than bans imposed from above that are in fact counter-productive and end up actually drawing attention to and promoting the banned product.

There should be greater efforts put into making critical media education a part of school and college curricula. At present, media education, such as it exists, tends to take the form of imparting skills rather than building sensibilities and sensitivity. Media education, whether as a curricular or co-curricular activity, could be an important site for fostering gender sensitivity at various levels within the educational system.

NGOs and feminist groups should be involved in consultations and initiatives at various levels, whether it is media education, creation and dissemination of alternative content, or events to dialogue with the media industry. NGOs that create media content, such as the Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT), could also be involved.

Given the growing reach of the Internet and social media, the use of such spaces to promote campaigns and initiatives towards greater gender sensitivity and gender–just media is crucial, particularly in reaching younger segments of audiences.

Organisations involved in media research, whether in universities, industry, or in the NGO sector, should be involved in monitoring and critically evaluating the media.

**State**

There is a need for advocacy and dialogue at various levels, especially with bodies that focus on women's issues, such as the National and State level Commissions for Women, as well as media regulatory bodies, such as the Central Board of Film Certification, to create greater awareness of gender and media issues within them.

The relevant ministries (e.g. Women and Child Development, Human Resource Development, and Information and Broadcasting) at national and state levels could also be involved in various initiatives, whether in terms of sponsoring gender-sensitive content or giving awards to such content or in programmes for media education.

Other state-related bodies involved in media content creation, such as the Films Division, Doordarshan, and All India Radio could also be involved in initiatives to introduce greater gender sensitivity in media programming.

**These interventions were prepared by Archana Garodia Gupta, President, FICCI Ladies Organisation, Mumbai, India.**

FICCI Ladies Organisation is very glad to collaborate with the Geena Davis Institute in working with the Film Industry to positively influence gender perceptions. Indian Cinema is hugely influential in creating cultural mores in India and indeed the world.

FICCI Ladies Organisation is the oldest business chamber for women in South Asia and is working on its mission to economically empower women since the last 32 years. We do this by creating Entrepreneurial motivation amongst women, training, skill development with employer tie-ups, and encouraging women to take up more nontraditional jobs. We also work at changing gender stereotypes amongst both men and women.

### Gender Situation in India

While the Indian Constitution grants equal rights to women and India has some of the most progressive laws in the world, gender inequality shows up visibly in many measures.

The most disturbing is the **skewed sex ratio** in the population. As per the 2011 census, there are 940 females for every 1000 males. In developed countries the number is typically about 1050 females to a 1000 males. With the Indian population at 1.3 billion, a simple calculation will bring forth that there are about **70 million missing women**! Some have been aborted in the womb and some have died of relative neglect in childhood, or during childbirth. According to a UN study, a female child has a 75% higher chance of dying than a male child in India. In the 2000s, there were 56 male child deaths for every 100 female deaths in India, compared with 111 in the developing world. A major cause for this is the prevalence of a pernicious dowry system (though illegal), especially in the north and west of India, where years worth of income is spent during a girl's marriage.

As per the Global Gender Gap Index by the World Economic Forum, in 2014, India ranked **134 amongst 142 countries in the economic participation gender gap**. The literacy rate for women is 65%, while for men it is 82%. The silver lining is that India was ranked 15th in the political gender gap.

Looking at the economic data from our census, **female participation in the work force is only 25%**. However the actual work done by women in the rural areas has been estimated at almost 80% in many states; it is unpaid work which does not get captured. Participation of women in nontraditional jobs is low, and women own less than 10% of Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises businesses.

Women own a minuscule fraction of land assets in India, estimated at **less than 5%** in many states. Though the law gives equal inheritance rights to men and women, only a very small percentage of women claim any right in their parental property. Traditionally, their dowry is considered their share of inheritance and other property, especially land, is supposed to belong to her brothers. It is socially unacceptable for women to ask for a share in familial property. Daughters are systematically discouraged to make any claims on parental property, especially land.

It is not, however, a uniform vista of doom. There are many Indians which exist concurrently; there are extremely empowered women in all professions, alongside women who live in medieval seclusion with practically no rights. In fact, a historian once said that in India all ages of man coexist – there are still people living hunter-gatherer lifestyles, Neolithic lifestyles, and medieval lifestyles, and as well as the most modern lifestyles.

### Role of Cinema

Indian cinema is in a unique position to help bring about cultural change in the nation. The film industry in India is the largest in the world with an estimated 1000 films produced every year in dozens of languages and an international viewership of about 3.9 billion (which is more than the viewership of Hollywood). Films are the primary source of entertainment for Indians and the cultural constructs created by them strongly influence the thinking of men, women, and most importantly, the new generation.

As Oscar Wilde said, "life imitates art far more than art imitates life." Though films reflect society around them, they have the unique power to change society as well. Besides the portrayal of women in main roles influencing us, there is invidious subliminal conditioning that takes place by only seeing women playing subsidiary roles on screen, which may be even more instrumental in shaping our thoughts.

### Portrayal of Women in Indian Cinema

How are women portrayed in Indian films? While many remarkable women-centric films have been made over the years, some of the recent ones (e.g. Queen, Mary Kom, and Mardaani) have not moved very far from the millenia–old constructs created by our patriarchal society. Women are generally peripheral to the story and are portrayed as embodying the virtues described in this 1000 year old Sanskrit Shloka quote, which could be the blueprint for how women are portrayed in the mainstream Indian film industry:

*"Karyeshu Dasi, Karaneshu Mantri; Bhojeshu Mata, Shayaneshu Rambha,*
*Roopeshu Lakshmi, Kshamayeshu Dharitri, Shat dharmayukta, Kuladharma Patni."*

*Translation: She works like a slave, she advises like a minister, she feeds you like a mother, she is skilled in bed like the divine courtesan Rambha, she is as beautiful as the goddess Lakshmi, and she forgives your transgressions like the earth. These are the six qualities of an ideal wife.*
*– From Neetisara (Aphorisms)*
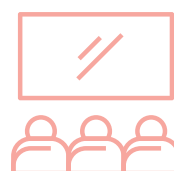
Women in Indian films are trapped in this stereotype. In earlier films, their role was essentially to be available as the long-suffering helpmeet and caregiver to the family, with no identity or decision making of their own. They suffered all and sacrificed all for their families. To that, in the past few decades, has been added a portrayal of the glamourous "heroine" in a "movie star" way. Indian films are third, behind German and Australian movies, in showing females in "sexy attire."

Another trend that essentially began in 1995 with "Hum Aapke Hain Kaun," is to show unimaginably lavish weddings – further reinforcing the cultural construct requiring the bride's father to spend enormously on weddings. The pressure on expensive weddings accompanied by large dowries eventually led to the rampant female foeticide prevalent in India today, sometimes estimated at two million selective sex abortions per year.

Women are typically shown as non-working in films and, if employed, are seldom shown in positions of power or in STEM jobs (science, technology, engineering, and math).

Another issue is that women are portrayed on the sidelines, essentially discussing men. However, in real life, there is a world of women interacting with women that is likely not within the consciousness of male filmmakers.

An interesting international measure of this is the Bechdel test. A movie clears the Bechdel test if it satisfies three conditions:
1. The movie has to have at least two women in it,
2. who talk to each other,
3. about something besides a man.

On a website evaluating 4500 international films, only 58% of the films passed the test. Interestingly, a study in 2014 found that the films that passed the test had about a 37% higher return on investment (ROI) in the United States, compared to films that did not pass the test.

## Women's Participation in Indian Cinema

Women's participation in the industry is low. Though we see many women as the actors on screen, they have far fewer speaking roles or named parts in movies. Though this is true across the world, Indian films are nearly at the bottom, with only 25% of speaking parts belonging to women.

Women are far fewer in numbers behind the screen. Though India has had some of the earliest woman producers like Devika Rani and Jaddan Bai, and successful directors like Farah Khan today, India sees only 9% female directors, 12% female writers, and 15% female producers. These are less than global averages.

This also plays a role when it comes to the portrayal of women on screen, as it is measured that movies with female writers or directors have significantly more women on screen.

In addition, as is true in other industries as well, women typically hire more women.

## Recommendations: Life Imitates Art

To reiterate, films have a tremendous impact on the mindset of Indian society and can play an incredible role in influencing people to abandon gender stereotypes.

### How do we achieve these objectives?

1) Various film organizations of producers, directors, writers etc., and also individuals, should be engaged through workshops. Research should be shared and they should be encouraged to make films with more conscious thought.

   a) Films should include strong female protagonists.

   b) Films should have studied subliminal messages – an avoidance of negative images, and perhaps positive subliminal conditioning with portrayal of women with the characteristics as delineated below, to help build up perceptions of gender equality.

   • Women should be respected for themselves and not for any roles they are attributed.

   • Women should have their own identities and make their own decisions.

   • Women should be shown exercising their rights, rather than sacrificing them on the altar of family or public good.

   • Women should be working in various professions. In particular they should be shown in nontraditional jobs and senior- and other-level positions, maybe even as taxi drivers, bus conductors, and security guards. FLO Film Festival is working on training women in these jobs across the country.

   • Men should be shown sharing her household and caregiver jobs.

   • Women should be shown as mobile and free to move around, especially in public spaces.

   • Women should be in control over their own bodies, in terms of what they wants to wear or do.

2) Brand ambassadors could be created in the film industry to encourage these objectives.

3) Employment of more women in decision-making positions would automatically help in making both the industry and films more women friendly.

4) Skill training programs and institutes could be created for women in various jobs in the film industries to facilitate larger employment.

5) The government could encourage institutions such as the National Film Development Corporation of India to finance more women centric films, or set up new institutions.

6) Companies could be encouraged to use their Corporate Social Responsibility budgets to finance films that promote gender empowerment.

7) This engagement should not only be with the Hindi film industry, but also regional industries.

8) FLO Film Festival could organize similar workshops across the country to sensitise the local film industry about gender issues.

9) Awards should be instituted for contribution to gender perception.

# APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP MODERATOR GUIDE
## GLOBAL GENDER IN MEDIA IMPACT STUDY
### Discussion Guide

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## WARM UP                                    10 MINS

**EXPLAIN THE PROCESS:**
**Moderator introduction. Explain two-way mirror, recording, etc. There are no right or wrong answers. We want your honest opinions. Very important to be open/honest with your feelings.**

**FOR PARENTS GROUPS ONLY:**
What are the ages and genders of your children? (Each parent should consider their child(ren) when answering questions, with the focus being on their daughters.)

**RESPONDENT WARMUP:**
I'd like to find out everyone's name, age and some of the things you like to do for fun (movies, television, games, books, live shows, etc.)!

# SOCIAL BEHAVIOR/MOVIES

## 40 MINS

**Rotate order of questions across the different groups**

What do you feel is expected of you in different roles in your life? (As a student, in your family, in your community, religion, etc.) Are expectations different depending on the role?

**SAMPLE OF QUESTIONS TO PROBE:**

Do you have chores? What types of chores do you do?

Do you read books? What types of books do you read?

What are some of the characters like in those books?

How important is education? Is it important for everyone to receive an education?

If not, who is education not important for?

What occupation would you ideally like to have?

**(CHILDREN: What do you want to be/do when you grow up?)**

Do you feel there are any obstacles to having that career/job? What are they?

Are only certain people suited for certain jobs?
For example, when you think of a nurse, who do you picture? What does that person look like?
How about for a police officer? For a teacher?

Where do you get the idea of what a nurse, police officer, teacher looks like
– experience, books, movies, TV shows?

**FOR PARENTS, GENERAL ONLY:**

Do you feel there are any obstacles to the goals or dreams that you want to achieve?
If so, what are those obstacles and can they be overcome?

**PROBE**

Thinking over the course of your lifetime, how have gender roles changed?

How have they remained the same?

Has the fact that you are a [man/boy, woman/girl] impacted your life positively and/or negatively?

In what ways?

# MOVIE SCENES                                    40 MINS

**Moderator NOTE:**

These scenes are meant to open up a discussion about gender roles. The focus of this section is to get the respondents to discuss their feelings about the characters behavior and if/how the situation the characters are in relates to their own lives.

**I'd now like to show you a scene from a movie. It doesn't matter if you've seen the movie before or not. Make sure you watch carefully because we'll be talking about what you thought afterwards.**

**Scene #1- MALE/FEMALE INTERACTION SCENE**

How do you feel about the characters in the scene?

**PROBE**

What specifically did you like/not like about the interaction the characters had?

Do you relate to any of the characters?

What do you think about their appearances?

Do you think that any of the characters should have responded differently in the situation?

Why?

**I'd now like to show you another scene from a movie. Again, it doesn't matter if you've seen the movie before or not. Make sure you watch carefully because we'll be talking about what you thought afterwards.**

**Scene #2- DOMESTIC RELATIONS SCENE**

What are your thoughts/feelings about this scene?

Describe the relationship between the characters.

**PROBE**

Are the characters/relationships believable?

Do you relate to any of the characters?

How do you feel about the situation they are in?

Did you find anything in either of the scenes you just saw disturbing?

Did anything in either scene make you uncomfortable?

What do you think about each character's behavior in these scenes?

## MOVIE SCENES CONTINUED                                    40 MINS

**PROBE FOR EACH CHARACTER:**

Is it clear why they are responding in the way in which they are?

Are their reactions appropriate given the situation they are in?

In what ways are they appropriate/not appropriate?

What would be a more appropriate response?

## IMPACT OF MEDIA                                           30 MINS

**For General and Parents ONLY**

What is the role, if any, of local media – specifically movies and television – in shaping attitudes and ideas about gender roles within your society?

What should their role be?

What is the impact of locally–made entertainment?

Is it generally positive/negative?

How does locally–made entertainment (movies and television) impact men and women in society?

Is it different based on whether they are a man or a woman? If so, in what ways?

In what ways, if any, do you think that locally–made entertainment has an impact on children?

On their ideals of the world? Is it typically a positive or negative impact?

In what ways?

**Now we want to talk about local media's impact on health issues.**
Are there any movies or television shows you've seen that discussed a health issue that you found particularly interesting or informative?

What are your general thoughts about these types of issues being included in movies or television shows?

Have you ever sought out more information for a health issue based on something you saw in a movie or television show?

Have you ever shared information you saw in a movie or television show on a health related topic with others?

Have you viewed a movie or show specifically because it dealt with a health issue that was important to you?

<table>
<tr><td><strong>WRAP UP</strong></td><td align="right"><strong>5 MINS</strong></td></tr>
</table>

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.**

## APPENDIX B: GENDER INEQUALITY IN INDIA

India is a country of remarkable demographic diversity, with dramatic variations in basic demographic indicators including life expectancy, fertility, infant mortality, ratio of males to females, and education. While some areas of the country have demographic features similar to middle-income countries, others more closely reflect the world's least-developed countries. Across state, regional, and class differences, however, gender discrimination remains a major barrier to female autonomy and well being. India remains a patriarchal country where boys and men are valued over girls and women.

Economic gender gaps persist in India. The country has the world's sixth largest gender pay gap, with men making 24% more than women. The salary discrepancy between India's elite male and female actors is startling: top male stars command wages as high as $16 million per film, which is comparable to popular western stars, while Indian actresses make no more than $1.5 million per movie.

Political gender gaps also exist in India. Despite having a female prime minister in 1966 (Indira Gandhi served from 1966 to 1977 and again from 1980 to 1984), women are grossly underrepresented in Indian government, with only 11 women to 89 men in Parliament. Significantly more men are literate in India than women (75% compared to 51%) and educational access varies widely by gender.[20] The Indian government has prioritized access to education for Indian girls and enrollment in primary education has almost reached parity.

The cultural preference for sons in India is particularly strong in some regions, making it more difficult for young girls and women to get access to health care, nutrition, and basic education. Sex-selective abortion is common in India, especially among the affluent. The 2011 census revealed that there are only 914 girls for every 1,000 boys among children ages six or younger in India, the lowest ratio of girls to boys since the country gained independence from Great Britain in 1947. A team of international researchers examining this census data found that four million to 12 million selective abortions of girls have occurred in India in the last 30 years. The United Nations Populations Fund estimates that some 13 million girls are "missing" in India, meaning they would have been born if there were no sex-selective abortion or female infanticide. In Northern India in particular, the higher value put on sons leaves female infants and young girls undernourished and without access to preventative health care.

Disturbingly, according to the National Crime Records Bureau, violence against women and girls in India seems to be increasing despite rising access to education and more awareness about gender discrimination. Researchers have found that between 25,000 and 100,000 Indian women are killed annually over dowry disputes, as many as 100,000 are burned to death every year, and some 125,000 die of injuries due to violence. Domestic violence is endemic and often culturally acceptable. The issue of widespread and

socially acceptable violence against women in India made international news in December 2012 with the gang rape, evisceration, and murder of a 23-year-old student, Jyoti Singh, who was riding a public bus home from a movie in New Delhi at 9:00 p.m. Mass demonstrations across India protesting the gang rape, the collusion of the police, and low conviction rates for perpetrators followed.

There have long been Indian human rights activists resisting gender discrimination and championing equal rights for women. Despite increasing gender discrimination and recent setbacks, there have also been some improvements. In 2013 the Indian parliament passed a law to criminalize sexual harassment, voyeurism, and stalking. The law also makes sexual assault for repeat offenders and rape that results in the death of the victim, punishable by the death.

"India's Daughter," a UK-India collaborative documentary by Leslee Udwin about India's rape culture, was the centerpiece of a campaign to end gender inequality in India, which launched on International Women's Day in 2015.

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