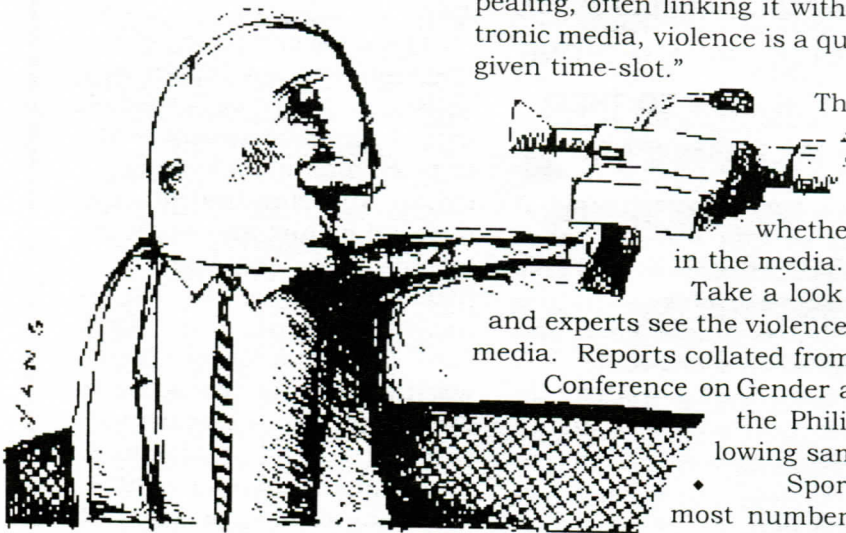


*"Media violence is different from real violence because no real visible long-term effect is perceived by the viewer."*

Shari Graydon and  
Elizabeth Verrall

**I**t is a never-ending story, like a refrain that is played again and again. Through the decades, in so many survey reports, conference proceedings, books and newspaper articles, both in developed and developing countries, feminists have documented and decried commercial media's treatment of women and stories that have perpetrated violence against them. It seems that their battles have not yet been won.

Two Canadian women said that "very calculated decisions are made at every stage of construction of media violence." Shari Graydon and Elizabeth Verrall, president of Media Watch in Canada and Canadian English teacher, respectively, in a curriculum kit released by the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario, wrote that "violence is made to seem appealing, often linking it with power and pleasure. In the electronic media, violence is a quick way to resolve conflict within a given time-slot."



They said that violence through the media can be verbal, physical, psychological, and/or sexual. And violence against women, whether subtle or overt, is often portrayed in the media.

Take a look at how Asian media practitioners and experts see the violence against women perpetrated in the media. Reports collated from papers presented at the Regional Conference on Gender and Communication Policy held in the Philippines in July 1997 give the following sampling.

- Sports newspapers in Japan sell the most number of copies because of pictures of

# media

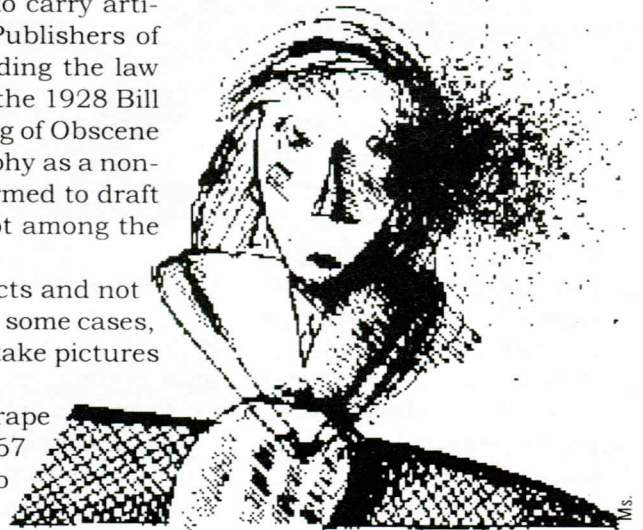
By Leti Boniol

nude women and sex stories. Rape is covered in sports papers only when murder is involved and the victim is usually named. The stories do not use the word "rape" but the Japanese term for "mischief." Publications that target boys and adolescents carry messages of aggression and violence. These same messages are also on television and in print cartoons, computer games, school supplies, pillows, chopsticks, and stationery. The television programs and publications are also very popular outside Japan. Television programs sold as family-oriented shows feature women in bikinis trying to climb up a slope. The camera focuses on their hips, legs and buttocks.

- ◆ The increase in rape cases, including rape of children, and harassment in the streets of India are linked to the way women are projected in media. Films, the major source of entertainment in India (the world's largest source of films), and television programs always revolve around sex plots and divorce and bigamy themes to excite and entertain audiences including young viewers who are highly impressionable.
- ◆ Pornography is illegal in Thailand but porn magazines are always available to those who seek them. In fact, they shamelessly proliferate. Even newspapers and magazines that tackle political and social issues have started to carry articles on nude models to increase readership. Publishers of pornographic materials have succeeded in evading the law because of the flawed definition of obscenity in the 1928 Bill on the Suppression of the Promotion and Trading of Obscene Materials. The Thai press still regards pornography as a non-issue. While a press council is already being formed to draft a code of conduct for newspapers, sexism is not among the issues being covered.

Moreover, the law only protects child suspects and not victims of rape, child abuse and child murder. In some cases, newspaper and television reporters compete to take pictures of the girl victims.

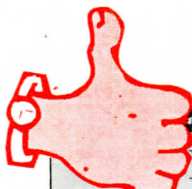
- ◆ In Indonesia, the number of reported cases of rape between 1980 and 1993 has increased by 15.67 percent each year, making it the number two crime in this country. In reality, rape is the



Ms.

# Violence





4. Pag-ibig sa pamilya. Pag-ibig sa bayan

## Mga Dakilang Kababaihan Ng Ating Kasaysayan.



Josefa Abierias



Tandang Sora



Josefa Llores Picada



Teodora Alonzo



Gabriela Silang



Raymunda G. Abila

Prinsesa Urduja

Melchor Aquino o "Tandang Sora" ang dakilang ina ng Rebolusyon ng 1896. Teodora Alonzo ang ulat na magpapatal na ina ni Dr. Jose Rizal. Gabriela Silang - magiting na bayani ng Binondo. Prinsesa Urduja - magiting ng kalapangan labas sa mga diyosidad. Josefa Picada - ama ng makasaysay ng Caricatures of the Philippines. Josefa Abierias, ang itinatagang ng mga sinuring-patal na kababaihan. Raymunda Guioke Abila - isang bayani ng World War II. Sila ay dalawang sa mga dakilang babawing Filipino na nag-alala ng pino, durong, pambili sa mga gawing bayan. Sila ang kinakatawan sa tinay na alawa ng Pag-ibig sa Pamilya.

Isang pagpapagay mula sa



**Pag-IBIG Fund**

bilang pagdiriwang sa Ika-100 na taon ng ating kalayaan.



number one crime because there is a far bigger number of unreported cases. One of the major reasons why a lot of rape cases remain undocumented is the stigma associated with rape especially when it is covered in the media.

- Photographs and cartoons of women are almost exclusively negative and normally offensive in Cambodia. Photographs of naked women and girls are regular features of some newspapers and magazines. Naked photos of Western women appear to be included for their freak value and often feature women with abnormal bodies. Cartoons featuring women tend to concentrate on their sexuality as the content of jokes. The second most popular daily newspaper publishes pornographic stories on page two everyday. The text explicitly de-

scribes sexual acts and female genitalia in offensive terms and is always accompanied by explicit drawings of women and men engaged in sex, including rape scenes. It is common for the men to be dressed in military uniform and armed and the women naked.

- In Mongolia, domestic violence, sexual abuse and harassment are not often portrayed substantively. Yellow newspapers constantly write about rape and domestic violence to ensure sales. Many pornographic newspapers that copy Western formats have emerged. Prime time television shows depict a lot of uncensored violence and pornography.

Similar litanies can be gleaned from reports from the Philippines and other Asia-Pacific countries.

### CHANGES IN THE COVERAGE

But while the litanies may be long, there have also been positive developments.

- Over the last two years, awareness of women as victims has increased in Cambodia, the Women's Media Center of Cambodia (WMC) reports. The number of positive stories have increased while negative stories have decreased. The center attributed this to lobbying, journalists' workshops, and the positive image of women on television and radio.
- Since 1992, media practitioners say that time given to women's programs in Malaysia has increased. Current affairs television programs have dealt with

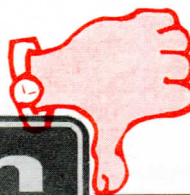
issues such as Muslim women's rights and women trafficking. But stereotyping has remained.

In print, although women are no longer confined to cooking and beauty and fashion and now tackle women's rights, health, and politics, they still do not make the news. Efforts by women media practitioners have changed particularly the English language dailies. Women activists network with media practitioners to raise awareness on key issues of concern to Malaysian women. Starting in 1985, a coalition of women's groups campaigned for nine years addressing several issues: domestic violence, sexual violence, pornography, and sexual harassment. Media support, particularly its focus on rape and domestic violence, maintained public awareness.

- In South Korea, women are now increasingly projected as active, self-confident, and professional due to the efforts of feminists and changing life-style. But the distorted and despised image of women has not improved over the years despite all the promises, says a paper presented by Kyung-Ja Lee, dean of the Graduate School of Journalism and Communication, Kyung Hee University in South Korea. The portrayal of women as sex objects is also an emerging issue.
- Sudip Mazumdar, *Newsweek* correspondent, reports in a 24 November 1997 article that "the Indian film industry, the

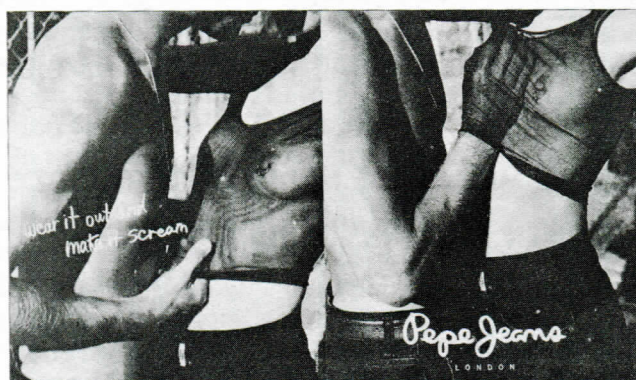


**VIOLENCE IS MADE TO SEEM APPEALING, OFTEN LINKING IT WITH POWER AND PLEASURE. IN THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA, VIOLENCE IS A QUICK WAY TO RESOLVE CONFLICT WITHIN A GIVEN TIME-SLOT.**



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world's largest producer of cheap popular dramas, is having second thoughts about gore." Western film imports, he says, are now driving many of the improvements in Indian theater. Feel-good movies are in, violence out.

Sylvia Spring, a feminist connected with Media Watch-Canada, said during the Asian Regional Conference on Gender and Communication Policy that gender and media-related issues have not changed. What is changing is how the issues are being played out. There is more subtlety. While there may be no more naked women in the media, the stereotypical portrayal of women remains "insulting."

In the Philippines, a feminist journalist says that Phil-

ippine media's coverage of women has improved in the 1990s with more journalists conscious of their handling of sexual harassment and rape cases. However, at least eight tabloids churn out hundreds of thousands of copies daily with semi-naked women splashed on their front and inside pages and lewd stories. And more are joining the pack.

"The media does not just reflect reality, it operates at a far more fundamental level to legitimize existing social relations, indeed, to create a reality," said Allison Gillwald, lecturer at a South African university, in a 1994 article, "Women, Democracy and Media in South Africa." (*Media Development*, 2/94).

#### GAPS BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE

There may be media policies but these are unclear, inconsistent, or lacking in gender-specific provisions. They are also largely ignored.

- ♦ In Cambodia, a national press law was passed in 1996. Two journalists' associations have their own codes of ethics and committees that monitor their implementation. But no policy specifically refers to the coverage of women. Obscenity, vitriol, and the portrayal of women as sex objects violate Articles 7 and 14 of the press law. Article 7 prohibits the publication of obscene texts or pictures or graphically violent material and Article 14 says that the press "should not publish anything which







# THE MEDIA DOES NOT JUST REFLECT REALITY, IT OPERATES AT A FAR MORE FUNDAMENTAL LEVEL TO LEGITIMIZE EXISTING SOCIAL RELATIONS, INDEED, TO CREATE A REALITY.

sorship board. But soft porn is still pervasive, especially in *karaoke* footages.

Women continue to be discriminated against in the media, participants declared at the end of the Gender and Communication Policy Conference. Several factors were mentioned, including the "structural constraints of media organizations, women's subordinated status, gender inequitable policies, and questions of democratization of the media."

Aside from the "inadequate and biased portrayal of women in media content, the media in our countries are a major contributor to the perpetuation of patriarchal and sexist gender identities and relations between women and men," the declaration added.

Among the participants' recommendations and strategies are:

- The development of a new code of ethics or guidelines or the revision of existing ones to include gender-sensitive, non-stereotype portrayal of women in various media genres and channels and the development of measures to ensure that the codes are followed strictly.
- The formulation by non-government groups of practical guidelines on the portrayal of sexuality and pornography through active discussion with diverse social groups; the guidelines should address the issue of reporting violence against

women. The identity of victims and survivors should be protected and their rights respected.

- The media should promote the positive portrayal of women's sexuality.

"The women-media relationship can only be analyzed, and successful strategies for changing it can only be developed, if we take into account the entire cultural, political, and ideological spectrum and study the economic context in which this particular relation (media-women) is created and takes shape," Gillwald said.

Another said that changes could not be effective permanently without broader social change. Education is the main way to improve women's status and increase the number of women journalists. There is need to first change society's opinion that girls should not go to school.

Meena Shivdas of the Asia-Pacific Development Center says that "while it is important to strategize and pressure for changes to the women and media situation with our reading and understanding of portrayal and representation, it is equally important to understand the implications of global processes of deregulation and developments in new technology. This is in order for us to locate the strategies within the framework of globalization and new technology which have given new dimensions to freedom of expression."

With all the media experts and practitioners doing their

share, will change be far behind? ☺

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