

Girls and Media

Media play an enormous role in girls' lives

- ◆ Regardless of age, race, gender, or income level, virtually all children live in media-saturated households: the majority (70%) of girls and young women ages 8–18 have a radio in their bedrooms, and half (50%) have a television in their bedrooms.¹⁰ (See also Figure 1.)
- ◆ The total daily media exposure (television, movies, video games, print, radio, recorded music, computer and Internet) among young people ages 8–13 exceeds eight hours (8:08). Girls ages 2–18 report 20 minutes less daily media exposure than boys (6:20 and 6:40, respectively).¹⁹ (See also Figure 2.)
- ◆ The amount of time young women spend watching TV, listening to the radio, or going online is related to a wide variety of social and demographic factors. Girls and young women from higher incomes are least likely to report a bedroom equipped with a TV — 44 percent where the median income is over \$40,000 and 61 percent where the median income is under \$25,000.¹⁰
- ◆ Although girls and boys do many of the same activities online at about the same rates, some differences do exist: Girls report more e-mail and instant messaging use than boys. Also, more girls than boys look for health, fitness, or dieting information online.¹⁷ (See Figure 3 and Table 1.)

TV images have the capacity to worry or even traumatize children

- ◆ In addition to modeling violent behavior, media can inflate the prevalence of violence in the world, cultivating a perception of the world as a dangerous place. Because children younger than 8 years cannot always discriminate between fantasy and reality, they are especially vulnerable to disturbing or fantastic images portrayed in the media.²⁷
- ◆ There is growing evidence that media violence engenders intense fear in some children that may last months and even years. Developmental differences have also been observed: children ages 2–6 are most likely to be frightened by grotesque visual images of animals, monsters, and natural disasters, while older children are more likely to be frightened by threats to their personal well-being.³

Figure 1: Media availability in girls' homes, ages 8–18, 1999.¹⁰

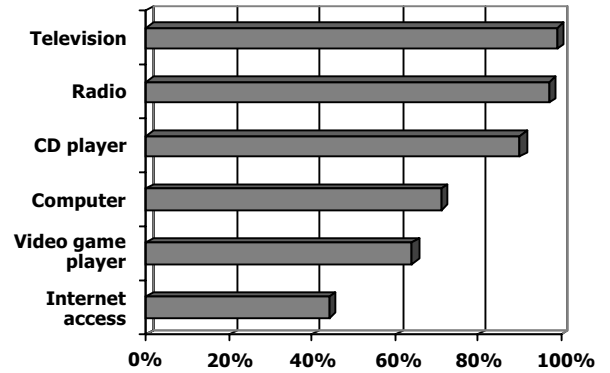


Figure 2: Average daily exposure to different media by girls and young women ages 8–18.¹⁰

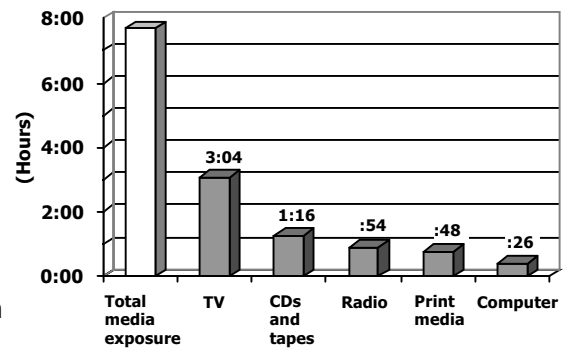
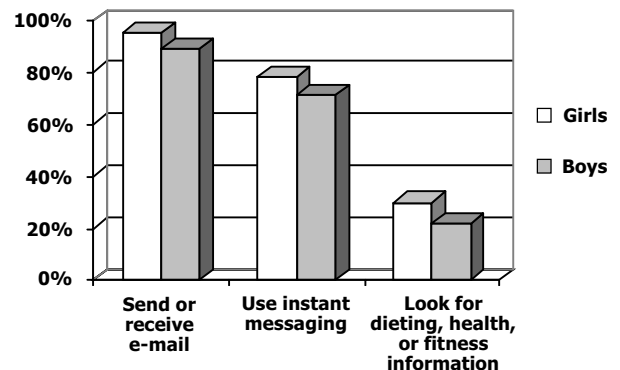


Figure 3: Percentage of girls and boys ages 12–17 who do the following activities online.¹⁷



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- ◆ The prosocial* effects of TV are much stronger and more persistent when adults discuss program content with children. Research has shown that using TV merely as a babysitter — even if viewing consists of prosocial lessons — misses opportunities for children to use TV as a learning tool.²⁰
- ◆ High-quality TV programming with prosocial content is more likely to be produced for preschool-aged children than for older children. Of all the preschool programs in the 1998-'99 TV season, 73 percent were rated as high quality by the University of Pennsylvania's Public Policy Center, compared to 28 percent of programming for elementary-age children and 29 percent for teenagers.²⁶

Violence on TV far exceeds the amount of violence in America

- ◆ More than 3,500 research studies have examined the association between media violence and violent behavior; all but 18 have shown a direct connection.⁸
- ◆ Research shows that it is not violence itself, but the context in which it is portrayed that can make a difference between learning about violence and learning to be violent. The strongest single correlate with violent behavior is previous exposure to violence. Violence that is shown to be "justified" and that is committed by "attractive" characters is more likely to be imitated than violence shown in context with real-world consequences.⁴
- ◆ Nearly half (47%) of parents say exposure to violence on TV contributes "a lot" to violent behavior in children. The same percentage also oppose "new government regulations to limit the amount of violence and sexual content on TV shows during the early evening hours."¹¹

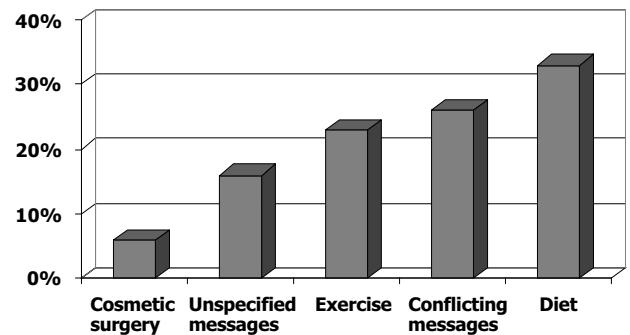
Media influence girls' health in a number of ways

- ◆ One content analysis of 21 popular young women's magazine covers showed that 78 percent contained a message about bodily appearance. None (0%) of young men's magazines contained such messages. Also, 26 percent of women's magazine covers contained conflicting messages (e.g., a message about losing weight next to a cookie recipe) regarding weight loss and dietary habits.¹⁸ (See Figure 4.)

Table 1: The percentages of boys and girls ages 12–17 who do the following activities online.¹⁷

	Girls	Boys
What more girls do online:		
◆ Send or receive e-mail	95%	89%
◆ Use instant messaging	78%	71%
◆ Look for dieting, health, or fitness information	30%	22%
What more boys do online:		
◆ Research items that they might like to buy	55%	77%
◆ Look for hobby information	62%	76%
◆ Play or download games	57%	75%
◆ Look for sports scores	32%	62%
◆ Download music	47%	60%
◆ Go to a Web site where people trade or sell things	20%	42%
◆ Create their own Web sites	19%	29%
What girls and boys do online similarly:		
◆ Go online for fun	85%	83%
◆ Visit Web sites about movies, TV shows, music groups, or sports stars	85%	81%
◆ Look for news	70%	66%
◆ Listen to music	59%	59%
◆ Visit a chat room	56%	55%
◆ Visit Web sites for clubs, activities, or sports teams of which they are members	38%	41%
◆ Find information that is hard to talk about with other people	17%	19%

Figure 4: Percentages of message types on 21 popular young women's magazine covers.¹⁸



* Television programs that feature friendly interaction, aggression reduction, altruism, and stereotype reduction.◆

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- ◆ Specific kinds of media, rather than *total* media, may be related to disordered eating and body dissatisfaction: Frequent music video viewing may be a risk factor for weight concerns among girls and young women². Among young women ages 15–18 who said they had used weight-control pills in the past year, 73 percent were also frequent readers of health and fitness magazines.²³
- ◆ Content analyses of TV programming suggest that girls and young women are shown that skinny is beautiful and that girls have to be attractive to men; that sex is fun and risk free; and that most people think about and have sex frequently, without much concern for love or the stability of the relationship.¹³ (See also Figures 5 and 6.)

TV consistently portrays stereotyped images of women and men

- ◆ Research has consistently found that the types of interactions portrayed between females and males in TV commercials are stereotypical.² Women have been associated with domestic settings at home and men with outdoor settings away from home; some researchers say this creates models of limited options for girls.²¹
- ◆ Not all teens are exposed to the same amounts or kinds of stereotypical media content. In some recent analyses of girls' and young women's Web sites, many girls were critiquing the images they see of themselves in the media and producing alternative models of gender roles and relationships.²² (See also Figure 11.)

Although safeguards exist, their use is inconsistent

- ◆ A nationally representative survey in 2001 showed that of all parents who have a V-Chip (the electronic device in TVs that rates the level of violence in programs), 53 percent do not know they have it. Of US parents who own a set with a V-chip, 17 percent use it to block programs with violent or sexual content.¹¹
- ◆ Research has shown that restrictive movie ratings actually entice many children to movies that are inappropriate for their age group.⁴

Media affect multicultural awareness of girls and young women

- ◆ Real or unreal, TV programming creates environments that influence young people about how to interpret and act toward people similar to and different from them.¹
- ◆ In a study of 1,428 characters appearing on prime-time TV, the female characters were overwhelmingly white (74%), followed by African American (16%), Asian (4%), and Hispanic (2%). Viewers were more likely to see an other-worldly female (ghost, angel) than they were a girl or woman portrayed as a Hispanic or Native American character.¹⁶ (See Figure 7.)

Figure 5: Percentages of TV programming with sexual content that also contain any reference to sexual risks, by genre.¹³

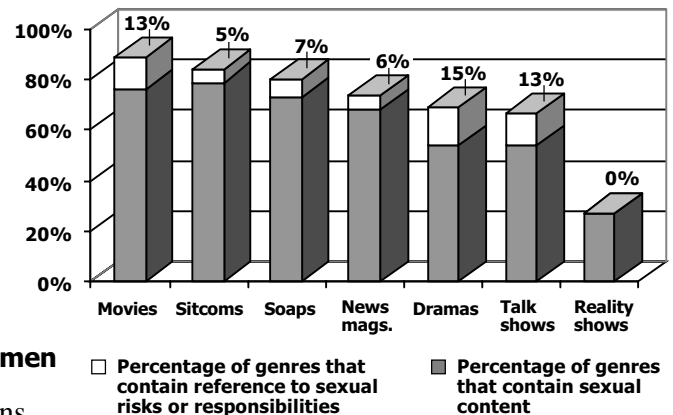


Figure 6: Relationships of prime-time TV characters involved in sexual intercourse.¹³

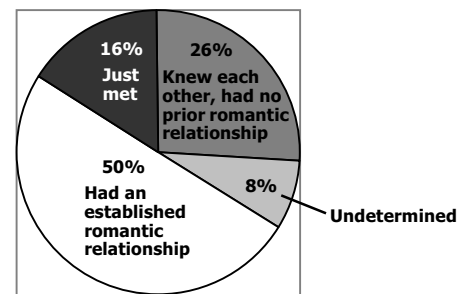
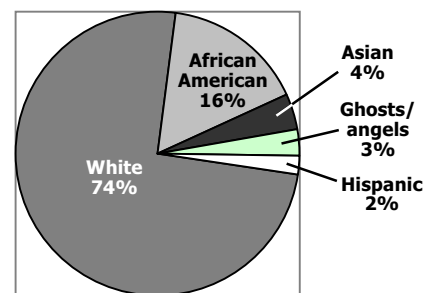


Figure 7: On-screen representation of women during prime-time TV, 2000-2001 season.¹⁶



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- ◆ Of all prime-time characters in the 2000–2001 TV season, 99 percent were heterosexual. Only one female character was gay, and none was bisexual.¹⁶

Few women create the media girls see and hear daily

- ◆ Women accounted for only 24 percent of the creators, producers, executive producers, directors, writers, editors, and directors of photography working on situation comedies and dramas in the 2000–2001 TV season.¹⁶ (See Figure 8.)
- ◆ Of 54,000 announcers working in the United States, about 6,000 (11%) are women, and among broadcast equipment operators, 6 percent are women.¹⁶
- ◆ Dramas and situation comedies airing in the 2000–2001 season featured fewer female characters than males — 38 percent — the same percentage of female characters recorded in the 1990–1991 season.¹⁶
- ◆ The amount of newspaper coverage of women’s sports has not kept pace with the popularity and growth of female athletics. A study that compared coverage of women’s athletics in newspapers in 1989 and 1999 showed that girls and women received just 2.2 percent of all sports coverage in 1989. Ten years later, when women comprised nearly 40 percent of all high school, collegiate, and Olympic athletes, women received 6.7 percent of the coverage.⁷ (See Figure 9.)

Advertisers specifically target girls

- ◆ Girls and young women are primarily told by advertisers that what is most important about them is their clothing, their bodies, their beauty. Girls of all ages get the message that they must be flawlessly “beautiful,” and above all else, they must be thin.¹²
- ◆ It is estimated that girls typically viewed more than 40,000 TV ads per year in the early ’90s.¹⁴ But with the growing number of 15-second spots, even this enormous figure may underestimate the true number of commercials viewed by the average child.⁵
- ◆ The nature of products marketed to girls in TV commercials has remained remarkably stable over time. More than 80 percent of all advertising to children under age 14 falls within four categories: fast food, toys, cereal, and candy. (See Figure 10).¹⁴
- ◆ Research has shown that children’s requests for advertised products decrease as they mature. While children become more critical about media offerings as they age, they also become more sensitive to peer influences.⁶

Figure 8: Percent of women and men working behind-the-scenes in the 2000–2001 TV season.¹⁶

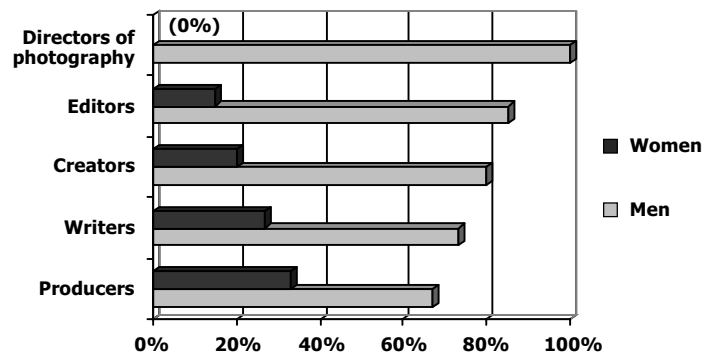


Figure 9: Percentage of newspaper sports coverage devoted to girls’ and women’s athletics, 1989 and 1999.⁷

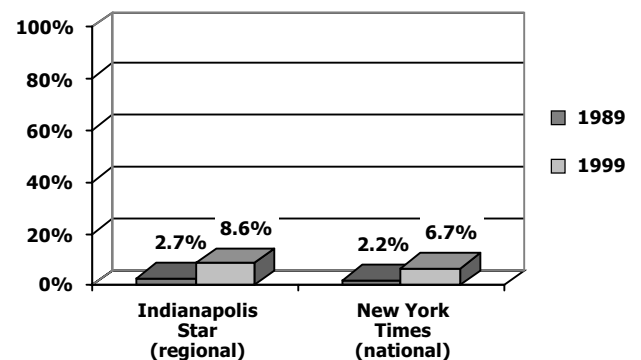
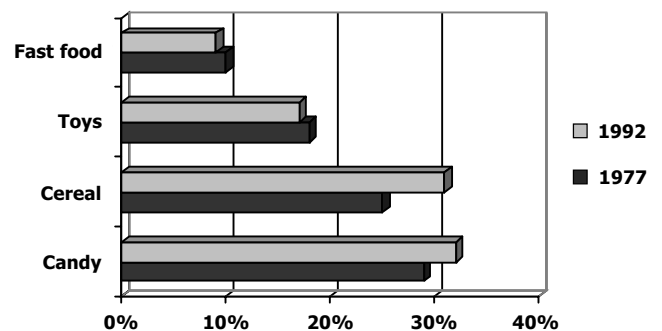


Figure 10: Percentage of products marketed to children under age 14, 1977 and 1992.¹⁴



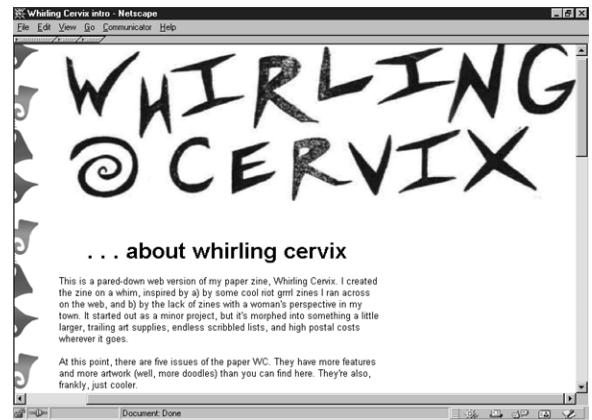
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- ◆ Teenage girls and young women spend over \$4 billion annually on cosmetics alone.¹²

Girls do not sit idly by — many create their own messages

- ◆ Of the nearly one-quarter (24%) of young people ages 12–17 who have created their own Web pages, 39 percent of them are girls.¹⁷
- ◆ Many young people who go online regularly are enthusiastic about expressing themselves. Nearly half (48%) of girls and young women ages 12–17 who go online every day have visited a Web site where they could express their opinions, compared to 31 percent who go online less often.¹⁷
- ◆ 'Zines, the homemade micro-publications usually created on a shoestring budget, have become a powerful tool for girls' and young women's self-expression. Because 'zines are produced by girls themselves, they tend to focus on concerns that are overlooked by larger, advertising dominated media.²⁴ (See Figure 11.)

Figure 11: An example of the Web version of a young woman's zine.



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Girls and Media (6)

For more information on girls and educational issues, see these Girls Incorporated® Facts Sheets:

- ◆ **Girls and Math and Science**
- ◆ **Girls and Information Technology**
- ◆ **Girls and Economic Literacy**

Girls Incorporated® covers girls and media in **Girls Inc. Media Literacy**, where girls learn to critique media messages. Girls also learn how to express themselves and create their own media representations of themselves and their worlds. **Girls Inc. Media Literacy** includes Girls Re-Cast TVSM, a program which leads girls ages 11 to 14 to consider the representation of girls and women in the media and become aware of their own media habits.

Girls Inc. is a national nonprofit youth organization dedicated to **inspiring all girls to be strong, smart and boldSM**. For over 50 years, Girls Incorporated has provided vital educational programs to millions of American girls, particularly those in high-risk, underserved areas. Today, innovative programs help girls confront subtle societal messages about their value and potential, and prepare them to lead successful, independent and fulfilling lives.

Girls Inc. reaches 920,000 girls ages 6–18 through programs and public education. Of the girls the organization serves, 70 percent are girls of color; 75 percent come from families earning \$25,000 annually or less; and 37 percent live with two parents.

Girls Inc. develops research-based informal education programs that encourage girls to take risks and master physical, intellectual and emotional challenges. Major programs address math and science education, pregnancy and drug abuse prevention, leadership, media literacy, economic literacy, adolescent health, violence prevention and sports participation.

The National Resource Center (NRC) is the organization's research, program development, national services, and training site. Research and evaluation conducted by the NRC provide the foundation for Girls Inc. programs. The NRC also responds to requests for information on girls' issues and distributes Girls Inc. publications.

Girls Inc. informs policy makers about girls' needs locally and nationally. The organization educates the media about critical issues facing girls. In addition, the organization teaches girls how to advocate for themselves and their communities, using their voices to promote positive change.

Girls Inc. is a nonprofit organization which receives 77 percent of its revenue from public support – corporations, foundations, government grants and individuals. The remainder comes from affiliate dues, fees, interest and dividends. More than three-quarters of the organization's functional expenses go directly to support program services for girls.

Girls Inc. national leadership focuses on developing innovative ways to leverage our most valuable asset – acknowledged expertise as the nation's premiere program provider and advocate for girls – to expand our reach to more than a million girls by the year 2002. Our leaders include Francis X. Burnes, III, Chair of the National Board; Joyce M. Roché, President and CEO; and Donna Brace Ogilvie, Honorary Chair.



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