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How Women's Consumption of Media Influences Leadership Development

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I. Introduction

The media is a reflection of society's values. Although it should be an unfiltered examination of the state of the world, the media is often populated with personal biases that influence public opinion. For the purposes of this paper, media will be defined as "an all-encompassing term that refers to a collective of communicatory mediums used to store or transmit information or data to inform or influence a wide range of audiences."¹ Advancements in technology have expanded the reach of the media to the Internet, television, radio, mobile apps, and print publications. As an entrepreneur interested in empowering girls, I participated in the Social Impact Research Experiment to gain a better understanding of how women's media consumption influences leadership development. In order to analyze this topic, I researched industry trends, conducted interviews with 20 female professionals who work in media, administered an online survey to more than 400 women across the United States, and held workshops for high school girls.

Gender inequality in the workplace is a systemic issue that can be overcome by changing the way girls perceive leadership positions. Adolescent psychologists have found that the most critical time in a girl's life is between the ages of 11-17.² During this time, "seeing is believing" for girls, meaning that personal and public female role models are a trusted source of inspiration. Researchers have concluded that teenagers benefit the most when their role models are people

¹ "Definition of Media" Mashable. 28 May 2014. Web.

² Correll, Shelley J., *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 106, No. 6 (May 2001), pp. 1691-1730.

they can realistically envision themselves becoming in the future. This seems more attainable when the student and role model share similar characteristics, such as their gender, educational background, or hometown. When young people cannot find relatable role models, a perceptual leadership gap ensues in which there is cognitive dissonance between one's ability and his or her likelihood of success. This issue is especially problematic for girls due to the scarcity of women in positions of power in politics, business, and academia. If girls do not see women in the Oval Office or Fortune 500 boardrooms, careers in male-dominated industries may seem elusive to them. The media is a powerful mechanism that subconsciously infiltrates the way society views women in leadership, altering people's choices and actions to widen the gender leadership gap.

II. Millennial Media Consumption Patterns

Millennials, digital natives between the ages of 18-34, represent 41% of the population in the United States and command the attention of content producers and advertisers.³ Since millennials are such an influential group of people in terms of social currency and purchasing power, I will use them as a benchmark for typical media consumption. In this section, I will detail the consumption patterns of millennials across the Internet, mobile apps, and television.

Internet

70% of millennials access the Internet using multiple devices, including their phone, computer, and tablet.⁴ Based on data provided by comScore, Digiday identified the most popular websites among millennials (see Figure 1.1).⁵ Topping the list are the viral startup BuzzFeed and

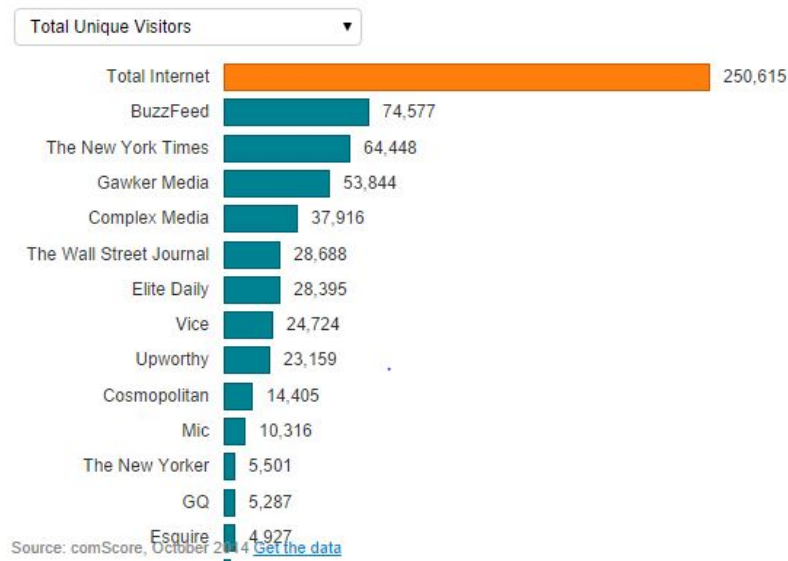
³Sidhu, Inder. "The Millennials: Your Guide to the Future." *Forbes*. 21 Oct. 2010. Web. Sep. 14. 2014.

⁴ Feeney, Christina. "Cross-Study Reveals 70 Percent of Digital Users Access Internet Across Multiple Devices" *Millennial Media*. 2014 May 7. Web. 2014 Sep. 25.

⁵ Blattberg, Eric. "2014: The Year in Millennial Media Consumption." *Digiday*. 15 Dec. 2014. Web. 16 Dec. 2014.

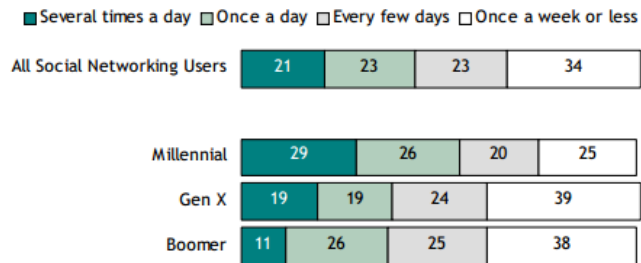
The New York Times. Millennials view the Internet as a portal of connectivity for their professional and social lives. 75% of millennials have created a social media profile, which is more than double the 30% of baby boomers that have adopted social media (see Figure 1.2).⁶ According to the Pew Research Center, 54% percent of millennials visit social media websites at least once a day.⁷

Figure 1.1
Publications and their millennial readerships (in thousands)



Millennials Make Frequent Visits to Social Networking Sites

% of social networking users who visit the site they use most often ...



Note: Based on adults who have their own social networking profile. Silent Generation not shown because of small sample size. "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown.

PewResearchCenter

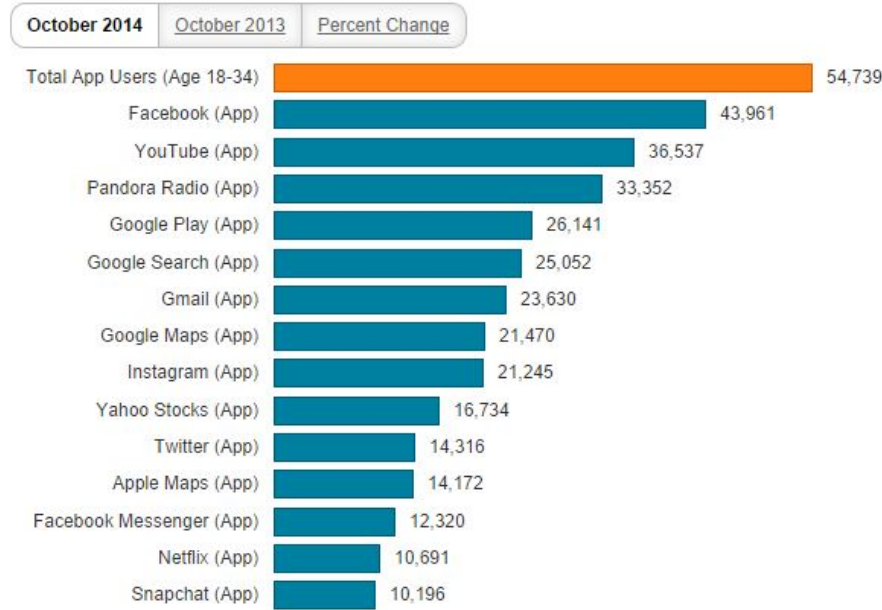
⁶ "Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next." Pew Research Center. 24 Feb. 2010. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

⁷ Same as 6

Mobile Apps

Millennials are the first generation to be introduced to mobile apps. 81% of millennials own a smartphone and 18% cite their cell phone as their preferred way to consume new information.⁸ In

U.S. Millennial Mobile App Unique Visitors (in thousands)



Source: comScore, October 2014 [Get the data](#)

Figure 1.3

smallest growth among millennials at 6% and 15% respectively.⁹

Television

Television is the primary way that millennials get their news. CNN is the most popular cable news source among this audience, while ABC is the dominant network (see Figure 1.4).

In a study conducted by Verizon, researchers found that millennials

their annual report of

mobile app visitors,

Digiday found that

Facebook’s messenger

app is the most trafficked

(see Figure 1.3).

Although Twitter and

Snapchat have reported

an increased user base,

they have recorded the

How Do You Get Most of Your News?

	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer	Silent
Main news source*	%	%	%	%
Television	65	61	76	82
Internet	59	53	30	13
Newspapers	24	24	34	50
Radio	18	22	20	15
Other	4	5	3	5
Television source*				
Any cable source	43	34	40	47
CNN	24	19	21	22
Fox news channel	19	15	19	26
MSNBC	7	6	6	6
Any network source	18	19	30	30
ABC	9	8	14	14
CBS	8	6	11	11
NBC	7	9	16	13
Local TV	16	16	20	14
Number of respondents	355	658	1149	690

Source: Pew Research Center

Figure 1.4

⁸ Lella, Adam. “Why Are Millennials So Mobile?” comScore. 2014 Feb. 7. Web. 22 Sept. 2014.

⁹ Same as 5

Figure 1.3

watch three times as much TV online than their non-millennial counterparts and 31% watch TV using their smartphones.¹⁰ 92% of millennials admit that they regularly use a second screen, a phone, laptop, or tablet, while watching TV.¹¹ 47% of this audience uses the second screen to learn more about the television content on the main screen, while the remaining 53% talk with friends, read news, and play games.¹² Advertisers have started to research millennials second screen consumption habits in order to learn how to leverage this growing platform.

II. Women in Media

Before analyzing women's media consumption patterns, it is important to identify women's contributions to media both onscreen and behind the scenes. First, I will examine the role women play in the dissemination of newsworthy information. Although television is the primary news source among millennials, there is not equal representation of gender on this medium. On the major networks news shows, including CBS Evening News, ABC World News, and NBC Nightly News, men anchor 60% of news broadcast and deliver 66% of the field reports.¹³ PBS is considered to be the network most conscious of eliminating gender biases with 43% of its coverage conducted by women.¹⁴ Since society has grown accustomed to men delivering hard-hitting news, female anchors and reporters have to work harder to gain the trust of their audience.

In a personal interview with Ms. Johnston, a former news anchor in a top ten regional market, it was evident that women in television face challenges and intense scrutiny. "Although I

¹⁰ Bednarksi, P.J. "Verizon Report Says Millennials Watch 3X More TV Online than Older Viewers." 6 Mar. 2014. Web. 28 Dec. 2014.

¹¹ Marshall, Carla. "92% of U.S. Millennials Turn to Second Screen While Watching TV." 5 Jun. 2014. Web. 19 Nov. 2014.

¹² Same as 11

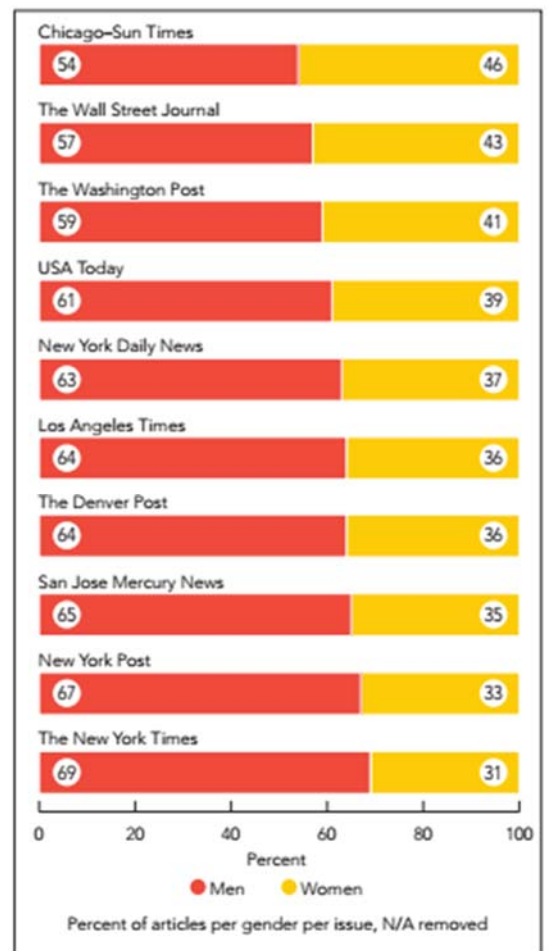
¹³ "The Status of Women in the U.S. Media 2014." Women's Media Center. 2014. Web. 10 Jul. 2014.

¹⁴ Same as 13

felt that women had equal opportunity and were paid as much as their male counterparts at my station, finding work-life balance was difficult. I had to arrive at the station at 4 AM and work until 3 PM before I had a three hour break until the 6 o'clock news. After the evening broadcast, I would go home for dinner and head back to the station at around 9 PM to prepare for the 11 o'clock news." Despite the taxing schedule, Ms. Johnston found her job fulfilling and felt a strong obligation to bring a voice to the voiceless in her community. Unlike their male co-workers, Ms. Johnston claimed that the female members of the news team were held to a different standard based on their appearance. Detailing this experience, she revealed that "we were always told how important it was to look our best. The producers noticed when we cut our hair and gained weight." When asked what improvements she would like to see for women in television, Ms. Johnston candidly replied, "I would like women to be more supportive of each other. Since the number of anchor positions for women is limited, women feel like they are always competing for each other's jobs. Successful women in television need to make a more conscious effort to mentor the young women just entering the field."

Gender disparity also persists among journalists in print and online publications. 63% of byline credits in print, online, and wire news are attributed to men.¹⁵ Among the top ten most circulated newspapers in the United States, the *Chicago-Sun Times* ranks the highest in the percentage of female-produced bylines at 46%, while

Figure 1.5



¹⁵ Same as 13

The New York Times had the lowest percentage at 31% (see Figure 1.5).¹⁶ In terms of assignments, women tend to cover “softer” news, including 49% of health stories, 45% of lifestyle news, 43% of education stories, and 42% of culture stories.¹⁷ Men are disproportionately tasked with reporting on stories that highlight business/economics, technology, and world politics.¹⁸ Women are also quoted less as experts in the nation’s leading newspapers. During a three-month period in 2013, the front-page of *The New York Times* quoted men 3.4 times more often than women.¹⁹ Men also outnumber women 4 to 1 as opinion page columnists.²⁰

On stage at the GenHERation Connection 2014 Philadelphia conference, I talked with the Managing Editor of Yahoo Travel about gender biases in the newspaper industry. Ms. Piazza described her experience as a young female journalist: “I started working at a male-dominated newspaper when I was 23. It was still very much the Old Boy’s Club. I realized that I had to work harder, faster, and be better to get the kind of assignments the guys were getting. The editors would send me out on assignments like ‘The Running of the Brides’ where I had to dress up in a wedding dress and run through a cake obstacle course or a beach volleyball tournament out in Coney Island. When I would have to do these ‘girl’ stories, I would make myself stay up late and also do these cop stories where I would be showing up in the projects and interviewing every suspect out there and breaking serious news stories. I would have to work doubly as hard to get the same assignments and get the promotion. It was really hard. I think that it is better now. I think that newspapers and a lot of media organizations now can still be an Old Boy’s Clubs. It’s incumbent on women to just worker harder, faster, and smarter to get ahead.”

¹⁶ Same as 13

¹⁷ Same as 13

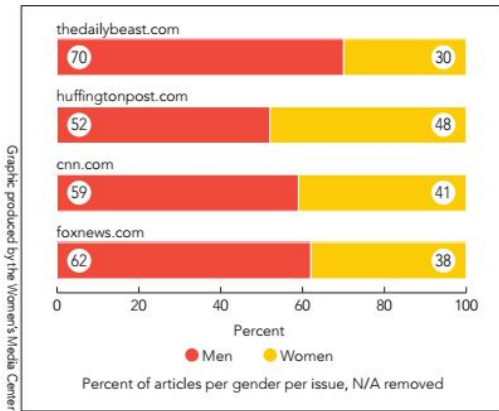
¹⁸ Same as 13

¹⁹ Same as 13

²⁰ Same as 13

The relationship between gender and bylines transcends online as well. Among the top four sources of online news, *The Huffington Post* demonstrates the highest percentage of gender parity with women representing 48% of its contributors (see Figure 1.6).²¹ Unlike the other

Figure 1.6



Graphic produced by the Women's Media Center

Source: Women's Media Center

companies, in addition to being a content producer, *The Huffington Post* is also a news-aggregator seeking contributions from as many people as possible. This creates a culture of collaboration among the editorial staff and the general public by encouraging people who are passionate about a particular issue to submit pieces for approval. This process is more appealing to prospective contributors,

primarily women. In a phone interview with Ms. Johnson, a former analyst at *Forbes* and *The Economist*, she described online content production: “Publishing is female-dominated, senior management was male-dominated, the editors were men, and writers were mostly women. With rapid advancements in technology, the industry is changing drastically. Online companies will need to become more inclusive toward women to prepare for the future.”

In contrast to the information-seeking nature of journalism, the entertainment industry promotes the subtle transmission of societal norms. On television in 2013, women occupied 43% of the speaking roles on prime-time shows. Even in Hollywood, women have less power than men because they are rarely depicted as people in high-profile jobs with authority. However, in 2005, this misconception began to change with ABC’s *Commander in Chief*, starring Geena Davis as the President of the United States.²² The leading networks have followed suit with the

²¹ Same as 13

²²Wilson, Marie C. *Closing the Leadership Gap: Why Women Can and Must Help Run the World*. New York: Penguin Group, 2004. Print.

development of series like *The Good Wife* (CBS), *Madame Secretary* (CBS), and *State of Affairs* (NBC). All of these shows highlight a strong woman who works in politics seeking to advance her career while maintaining work-life balance. Once society sees women in real and fictitious roles of power and success, they will be able to accept the idea of having women in more positions of power.

The film industry has less female representation than television. Of the 250 highest-grossing films of 2013, women comprised 16% of all directors, producers, writers, cinematographers, and editors and wrote only 18% of film reviews.²³ As evidenced by the recent Sony hack, even when men and women are in supposedly equal roles, men out earn women when they are co-stars in major motion pictures. Of the 17 highest-paid executives at Sony that earn over \$1 million, there is only female in this category, Amy Pascal, the Co-Chairman of Sony Pictures and the Chairman of SPE's Motion Picture Group. In a phone interview, a former senior executive at one of the "Big Six" movie studios in Los Angeles detailed the obstacles women face in Tinsletown: "There was clearly a glass ceiling at my company and everyone wanted to break it, but they did not know what to do. When female employees became pregnant, the senior executives would tell the women that it was annoying that they had to take time off of work. Before I moved to headquarters in Los Angeles, I worked in distribution in England. The culture at this office was more conservative than the LA office. There was a time that I did not get a promotion because I was a woman, even though I had met my financial targets and my male co-workers did not." When asked about the lack of females in production, she explained, "The writers are typically men. Female written movies are just for women and male written movies are for both men and women. Studios want to make money, so they invest in the movies that will attract the largest audiences."

²³ Same as 13

III. Survey

As the founder of a media organization for girls, I am always interested in learning more about the ways girls engage with media sources to develop interactive content. Over the summer, I distributed an online survey to girls who attended the GenHERation Summer Leadership Series in five cities across the United States. To learn how girls' attitudes toward the media changes with age, I opened the survey to women of all ages. The survey consisted of eight questions designed to identify the relationship between women's perception of leadership and their attitude toward the media. The questions were a series of multiple choice and free response questions, including:

- Rate your confidence on a scale of 1-10
- Rate your leadership skills on a scale of 1-10
- List three words that describe yourself
- Rank the following media outlets in order of importance (Internet, television, music, print, and mobile apps)
- What website do you visit on a daily/weekly basis?
- Name three of your favorite television programs
- The media I consume is an accurate reflection of my personal values and beliefs (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree)
- The media portrays women to be as equally competent as their male counterparts (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree)

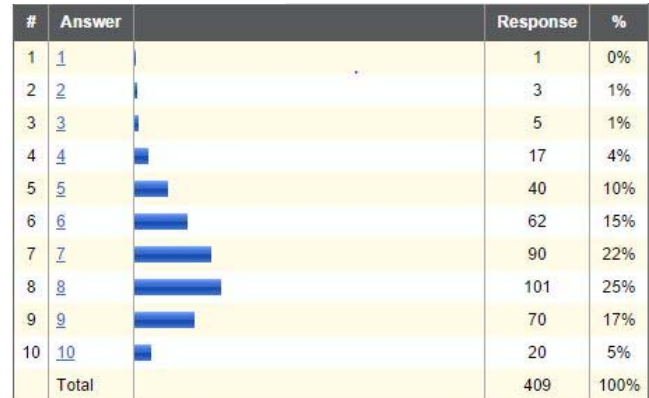
On average, women rate themselves as an "8" in terms of confidence and leadership skills (see Figure 1.7). Since this number is seemingly high, it is surprising that there are not more women

in leadership positions. It is possible that reinforced stereotypes prevent women from recognizing their potential and acting upon their instincts.

Figure 1.7



Rate your confidence on a scale of 1-10
*1=not confident 10=extremely confident



Rate your leadership skills on a scale of 1-10
*1=not a leader 10=excellent leader

Note: The total numbers are different because in some surveys every questions was not answered

Unlike the trends illustrated by Digiday in the section above, the women I surveyed demonstrated different preferences for media outlets. They ranked the media outlets in the following order of importance: Internet, music, print, television, and mobile apps. Since the Internet was determined to be the most important medium for women, I analyzed the ten most popular websites to see if they aligned with the millennial consumption benchmark. The results of this survey were: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Tumblr, BuzzFeed, Pinterest, Netflix, Yahoo, and Reddit. This list emphasized that women in my survey population visit social media websites more often than content websites. The top five television shows among this audience were the Friends, Scandal, Modern Family, Pretty Little Liars, and The Mindy Project. Based on these findings, I was interested to see how women associated their media consumption patterns and their views about women in leadership positions. When asked to evaluate the following statement, “The media I consume is an accurate reflection of my beliefs,” 41% decided that they “neither agree or disagree” (see Figure 1.8). Participants expressed a more

definitive answer to the last question in the survey, “the media portrays women to be as equally competent as their male counterparts,” with 44% indicating that they “disagree” and 28% signaling that they “strongly disagree” (see Figure 1.9). I believe that there is incongruence between the last two questions; if 72% of women surveyed feel that there is a gender bias in the media, why wouldn’t more participants disagree or strongly disagree that the media is an accurate reflection of their beliefs? It could be that society has developed blind spots to the way women are depicted in the media. I also attribute this dissonance to a hypothesis concerning different media consumption styles. This means that when people are “active” media consumers they are seeking out information to educate themselves and develop their opinions; this is when people can clearly recognize gender biases. For example, if a reader sees an article on CNN.com that criticizes Hillary Clinton’s appearance in a debate, he or she may think, “Why do reporters hold her to a different standard than her male opponents?” A “passive” media consumer is someone in search of entertainment or leisure. When people watch a comedy film, they may not ask, “Why aren’t any of the lead characters women,” because audiences are programmed to believe “it’s just a movie” in a fictitious world disconnected from reality.

Figure 1.8

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Strongly Disagree	11	3%
2	Disagree	81	20%
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	166	41%
4	Agree	117	29%
5	Strongly Agree	30	7%
	Total	405	100%

The media I consume is an accurate reflection of my personal values and beliefs

Figure 1.9

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Strongly Disagree	115	28%
2	Disagree	179	44%
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	66	16%
4	Agree	41	10%
5	Strongly Agree	6	1%
Total		407	100%

The media portrays women to be as equally competent as their male counterparts

V. Events

As part of my research, I chose to incorporate an experiential learning component into this project by holding events for high school girls to provide them with the opportunity to interact with female professionals in male-dominated industries. During the first week of August, I held the GenHERation Summer Leadership Series. I visited five cities across the United States to hold workshops



for more than 500 high school girls. These events featured panels of female professionals, interactive activities, and more than \$5,000 in scholarships. There were more than 20 female executives featured at the Summer Leadership Series, including the Vice President of Prudential Capital Group, an Emmy-winning producer from CNN, the President of a real estate development firm, and the Managing Director of JP Morgan Asset Management. At the end of every panel, we conducted a Q&A session between the girls and female professionals. In every city, the majority of questions focused on how the women achieved success by overcoming stereotypes portrayed in the media. Girls would ask, “Why don’t we see more women talking about finance on television?” or “Was it difficult to become a producer on a network led by

men?” The similarity among the girls questions reinforced my belief that the career paths girls choose is largely influenced by the information they absorb from the media.

In November, I held the GenHERation Connection 2014 Philadelphia for 200 girls in the Northeast. This was a full-day conference that allowed girls to collaborate with their peers and female professionals to learn more about career paths and engage in skill-building activities. Throughout the day, the girls participated in an app design challenge, a negotiations workshop, and a \$500 social business plan pitch competition. One attendee commented, “When my high school first advertised GenHERation, I was interested in the program immediately. Already knowing that gender discrimination still exists in colleges and in the workforce, I was intrigued by the idea of high school girls coming together and learning about other women’s success paths. The most important thing I took away from GenHERation was to not be afraid to take a chance. After GenHERation, even in the three days that have passed, I feel more open to anything concerning my future, especially at such a critical point in my high school career.” These events revealed the importance of helping high school girls identify positive role models to dispel the misconceptions perpetuated by the media.

V. Key Insights

Conducting this research project was an enriching experience that led me to realize that advancing women in media is a critical issue that requires significant effort. After reflecting upon my findings, I believe the most important takeaways are:

- 1) Relatable role models are essential to overcoming gender stereotypes ingrained in the media: Based on my discussions with female professionals and the girls at the GenHERation Summer Leadership Series, it is evident that women evaluate prospective

career options and professional advancement based on the experiences of other women they can identify with in the given industry. There is certainly “power in numbers” and as more women enter male-dominated fields, the more likely it will be for girls to explore professions that previously seemed unwelcoming to women. This process should be supplemented by mentorship, both for girls and women in the workforce, to foster personal discovery and growth.

- 2) Media companies have a responsibility to promote gender equality: Content creators have the power to influence how people consume news and entertainment, which contributes to the way people perceive their roles in society. With this privilege, they must make a conscious effort to rid themselves of gender biases. Although there are several centers dedicated to this cause, including the Geena Davis Media Institute and the Women’s Media Center, I believe that there should be a government institution that monitors gender discrimination across media companies to concentrate the efforts of the public and private sectors.
- 3) It is important for girls to recognize gender biases in the media at a young age: It is imperative that family members, educators, and coaches highlight the biased depiction of women in the media. During adolescent development, girls are very impressionable, which is why they must learn not to mistake fabricated stories in the media as truth. I believe that my work with GenHERation addresses this issue and I am dedicated to being an advocate for this cause. Once society places an emphasis on being inclusive to women through the media, we will see an emergence of female leaders prepared to catalyze change.

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