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Gendered power relations in the digital age: An analysis of Japanese women's media choice and use within a global context

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Gendered power relations in the digital age: An analysis of Japanese women's media choice and use within a global context

This study investigates the persistence of gendered choice and use of media, particularly in Japanese domestic settings. It shows how women's significant presence in the digital media environment does not necessarily translate into substantial changes in gendered power dynamics in choosing and using particular media for certain purposes at home. This project's authors, researchers from Argentina, Finland, Israel, Japan, and the US, analyzed interview data from Japan by drawing on the Foucauldian concept of micro-level power, which is categorized into three main types: personal authority, media affordances, and space-time constellations. Through this process, we interviewed 77 individuals, revealing that persistent gendered media choices and use exist in Japan. The project team also looked for similar cases in other countries for further theoretical implications. As a result of this investigation, we argue that the patriarchy continues to influence women's choice and use of media at home even in this media-saturated digital age. Our interview data show that 'old media' such as radio, television, newspaper, and magazines not only mediate information and entertainment contents at home, but also structure people's quotidian use of media, both old and new, and sustains existing gendered assumptions and values.

Keywords: media choice, media use, domestic settings, micro-level power, cross-national research

Introduction

For many women, ‘home’ has often meant a place where they must renounce their personal pursuits and preferences. Often, these women must abdicate their own lifestyles or goals to adapt to their daily duties and other family members’ needs (e.g., Michele Barrett 1988). Their choice of media is no exception to this pattern. Indeed, it has been argued that the choice and use of media are inextricably linked to traditional gender roles (Amparo Huertas Bailén and Yolanda Martínez Suárez 2013; Dave Morley 1988; Janice Radway 1991; Benjamin Toff and Ruth Palmer 2019; Eric Weiser 2000).

However, times have changed since only those ‘old’ media (radio, television, newspaper, and magazines) were available at home. The present media ecology includes highly individualized digital platforms as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, as well as various messaging apps. In this diversified landscape, women outnumber men in Internet usage, especially in countries with higher Internet adoption rates (OECD 2017). In Japan, the focus of this paper, in 2018, 13–49-year-old Japanese women were more likely to have accessed the Internet in the previous year than men in the same age group, and more women possessed mobile devices than men (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2018).

This research elucidates the persistent gendered nature of media choice, particularly in contemporary domestic settings. Drawing on a perspective that ‘technology is both a source and a consequence of gender relations’ (Judy Wajcman 2004: 163/2542), we contend that despite the age of ‘communication abundance’ (John Keane 2013), women around the world—notwithstanding the present global rise of feminist movements (Rosalind Gill 2016)—still play a passive, subordinate role in choosing and using media, particularly in domestic settings that are externally invisible. This paper investigates such perpetuation of gendered choice and use of media in everyday lives and illuminates how women’s substantial

presence in the digital media environment does not directly translate into significant changes in domestic gendered power dynamics. We examine this phenomenon mainly through Japan, exploring how patriarchy remains embedded in patterns of women's media choices at home, in this media-saturated, industrial nation.

The following Response Questions (RQ) drove our investigation:

RQ1: How do Japanese women choose media and use them in everyday domestic settings?

RQ2: How do they describe their everyday media choice and use in relation to their male partners or other family members?

RQ3: How are these practices structured by patriarchy and masculine power?

Thus, we analyzed interview data from a wide spectrum of Japanese respondents in terms of age and occupation. We also examined equivalent data from four other countries—Argentina, Finland, Israel, and the US—to place the Japanese situation in a global context, prevent blanket deterministic conclusions based on a single nation or culture, and illuminate the more general nature of gendered digital media consumption patterns at home. Thus, one further research question was investigated:

RQ4: Are there differences and/or similarities in how women choose and use media across Japan and the other four countries? If so, with which media and in what kind of interaction do we find such differences/similarities?

This paper contributes to the present feminist media scholarship by investigating Japanese women's media choice and use in domestic settings that have been relatively understudied. It reveals how both old and digital media tacitly continues to support patriarchal structures.

Women's media choice and use inside and outside their homes

Media consumption inside 'media-rich homes' has long been an important subject in media scholarship (David Morley 1988; Ellen Wartella and Nancy Jennings 2001; Supriya Singh 2001; Gill 2007; Lorna Stevens, Pauline Maclaran, and Miriam Catterall 2007). Since Roger Silverstone and Eric Hirsch (1992) proposed the domestic sphere as an integrative framework for analyzing the relationship between pre-established everyday practices and technologies, researchers have examined the home as a site of encounters and interactions with new technologies including multi-channel television sets, games, PCs, and mobile phones (Marsha Cassidy 2001; Francis Lee 2010; Pepukayi Chitakunye and Pauline Maclaran 2014; Preston Morgan, Daniel Hubler, Pamela Payne, Colby Pomeroy, Darcy Gregg, and Mark Homer 2017). These works demonstrate that men and women interpret their domestic space quite differently. 'Whilst for men it may be experienced as an unambiguous space of leisure, pleasure, and relaxation, for many women—even women who work outside the home—it is a site of repeated domestic labor, as well as having other meanings' (Gill 2007, 22: see also Morley 1988).

While scholars recognize such gendered differences in media consumption, women's everyday media use, particularly of online communication, has long been generally devalued in society and has received little targeted research attention, with a few exceptions (e.g., Sarah Pedersen and Caroline Macafee 2007; Gina M Chen 2015). Scholars have started to illuminate women's public digital activism (Jessalynn Marie Keller 2012; Hester Baer, 2016), and, recently, studies on feminist movements and actions regarding social media have substantially increased, especially after the 2017 global rise of the #MeToo movement (Jonas Kunst et al. 2019; Verity Trott 2020; Zhongxuan Lin and Liu Yang 2019; Jesse Starkey et al. 2019). Acknowledging the significant impact of global feminist awareness and actions supported by social media, this study focuses on the more mundane everyday media use in

domestic settings, such as watching TV after dinner, checking news on the smartphone at the kitchen table, communicating with friends via social media, which remains under-researched. We argue that scholars still have much to investigate to fully illustrate women's present, everyday media use, particularly for those living outside Western Europe and North America, when old and digital media are intertwined. This study also aims to be an intervention corresponding to the recent global resurgence of feminism awareness and movements that direct attention to feminist voices¹. It documents women's voices regarding daily-routinized use of old and digital media, which have been previously overlooked. Thus, the study aims to contribute to our understanding of the power dynamics of media-rich households that maintain and reproduce patriarchal structures.

In this paper, we focus on the choice of media at home in the ever-growing media ecosystem offering people multiple choices of media devices and platforms.

Japanese women and the media

Arguing that patriarchal relations persist for women in choosing and using media in Japan does not mean that women are passive and inactive regarding media. Women in Japan spend a considerable amount of time interacting with media. They spend, on average, more time (149.2 minutes/day) viewing television than do men (121.8 minutes). Women also more actively use mobile devices than men (Hashimoto Yoshiaki et al. 2018, 164-165).

Additionally, across all age and gender groups, women in their forties are the most active users of video recorders². Beyond their media time, women are creative and innovative in how they consume media by creating unique and sometimes emancipatory content (Lisa Skov and Brian Moeran 1995; Kaori Hayashi 2000; Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, and Misa

¹ For the status and critiques of the recent global resurgence of feminism, see Rosalind Gill (2016) or Catherine Rottenberg (2014).

² <https://www.j-cast.com/tv/2017/07/21303820.html?p=all>. Retrieved May 1, 2021.

Matsuda 2005). Women have even become Japan's digital economy engine (Gabriella Lukács 2020). Thus, women in Japan are proactive in using media in an information-saturated society. This study, therefore, seeks to illuminate the framework and conditions under which Japanese women choose media and use them differently than men and the reasons for their digital creativity and emancipation. There is still room for scholarly investigations to examine the choices of Japanese women's preferences for certain media, the reasons they turn to use these devices or platforms daily, and the relationship of these actions to gendered power relations.

Analysis of micro-level power

People usually choose a particular medium according to its perceived convenience and the availability of real-life resources including money, time, mobility, knowledge, friends, and social contacts (Karl Rosengren and Sven Windahl 1972). The availability and amount of such resources depend on one's societal position, which is inherently related to power distribution. Drawing on Michel Foucault's idea of micro-level, ubiquitous power (1990, 2117)—an insight often employed by media, gender, and cultural studies scholars (Gill 2007, 60–61; see also Cynthia Cockburn 1985; Wajcman 1991; Wendy Hui Kyong Chun 2006)—this study investigated the sites of gender-related power in home media choice and use.

As Foucault contends, 'power is everywhere' and 'comes from everywhere' (Foucault 1978=1990: 1186/2117). The modern power that controls people toward a certain collective set of behaviors is not only a sovereign, mono-directional repression from above but is also exercised from below with discourse and knowledge production, 'from innumerable points in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations in families and institutions' (Foucault 1978=1990: 1195/2117). Foucault converts the notion of power from the simple image of coercion or repression by one or more rulers to that of more subtle, persistent, and localized

controls with everyday conversations, negotiations, and practices among family or social group members. Accordingly, we explored the description of everyday media choice by Japanese women in relation to their male partners or other family members and examined how patriarchal dynamics work in their quotidian use of media in domestic settings.

We identified three main types of ‘micro-level power’ that influence individuals’ media choice and usage: personal authority, material availability/affordances, and time–space dynamics. Personal authority ranges from subtle recommendations by others to outright orders. Regarding gender relations, while there are people who explicitly desire to control their partners and family members, there are also latent mechanisms including subtle and tacit rules, norms, and agreements among family members to behave in particular ways (Marina Krcmar 1996, 251). Power, thus, does not always manifest itself as oppressive. Its exertion depends either on subjective mood and sensitivity or on situational social roles and is therefore subtle, fluctuating, and multifaceted, as shown by Pamela K. Smith and Wilhelm Hofmann (2016, 10046) through empirical investigations.

Control mechanisms are often incorporated in the material form and design of the media people use; in other words, the materiality of an appliance or device invites specific behaviors. This relational perspective of media appliances and individuals has been described as ‘affordances’ (Don Norman 1988). Following Norman’s (1988, 8) ‘human-centered design’ approach, Sandra Evans, Katy Pearce, Jessica Vitak, and Jeffrey Treem (2017, 36) defined affordances as possibilities for action that are structured in the relationship between an object/technology and the user and that enable or constrain potential behavioral outcomes in a particular context. Often, multi-dimensional relationships are established by the accumulation of the accessibility of platform technology, commercial interest, people’s literacy, and everyday practices, discourse, and images projected on respective appliances through historical developments and repeated everyday use (Benjamin Hanckel, Son

Vivienne, Paul Byron, Brady Robards, and Brendan Churchill 2019; Ioana Literat and Neta Kligler-Vilenchik 2019; Urszula Pruchniewska 2019; Urszula Pruchniewska 2019; Marcelo Santos and Antoine Faure 2018). This concept of affordance is often associated with newly emerging digital outlets such as social media. However, the concept can also be applied to old media. Affordance, in other words, refuses the extremes of ‘arbitrariness of radical constructivist positions as well as unilateral epistemology associated with technological determinism’ (Ian Hutchby 2001) and indicates sites of social negotiations and struggles in structuring and designing types of users and users’ behaviors in social and cultural contexts. For example, how people view television is closely interrelated with and partly stipulates who the viewers are because the device ‘television set’ mediates, if not determines, people who use it and how they view it.

Thus, device designers have much power to guide dominant affordances because they can maximize profits from the device and/or platform, even though affordances are constructed through negotiations among the user, interface, and designer (Angela Cirucci 2017). Therefore, often, the construction of affordances favors socio-cultural majorities with ideologies related to capitalism, techno-nationalism, and/or male domination and, thus, can support traditional class/race/gender hierarchies’ perpetuation (Becky Faith 2018). However, new media outlets have at times offered women and minorities enormous potential to resist existing power structures, thanks to the very affordances established between the appliance, technology, and users (e.g., women effectively used Twitter and Instagram for the 2017 global #MeToo movement).

Time and space represent the third factor that structures media use and communication; often, media experience is an ‘embodied spatial practice that produces space/time and is itself constitutive of social orders’ (Mimi Sheller 2015, 12). Ien Ang (1996, 15) highlighted ‘the increasing colonization of the times and spaces of people’s everyday

lives for the purposes of media audience hood.’ Chris Peters (2015, 1), meanwhile, emphasized the concept of space to comprehensively analyze people’s media use and proposed that media scholarship take a ‘spatial turn’ to treat time and space as equally important and indispensable for analyzing today’s digitized communication. According to Peters, digital media deconstruct practices determined at the interface of audience, space, and media. Peters’ analysis did not include gender perspectives; however, the idea of space is anything but gender-neutral, as gendered divisions of labor often designate where people work or how they spend their day. Therefore, we investigated how far the notions of ‘home,’ ‘family,’ and ‘domestic’ persist to shape women’s media choices and consumption, despite or because of digital media’s proliferation.

Identifying these three forms of power enabled us to more comprehensively understand women’s current situation regarding their everyday media choice and consumption at home, where digital and old media intersect. We contend that this perspective offers significant insight, particularly because current scholarly attention is predominantly directed toward a more sectorial use of digital or old media by vocal groups of women, typically seen with the global rise of the #MeToo movement. This research, by contrast, illuminates women of various ages and lifestyles using various media in their daily lives at home, in ways that often reflect masculine influence, control, or even oppression.

Materials and methods

This research is part of a comparative study by a multi-national project team in Argentina, Finland, Israel, Japan, and the U.S. These five countries are culturally and geographically distinct but share many important features including wide Internet availability (Table 1) and democratic regimes prohibiting gender discrimination.

Members of this five-nation team conducted interviews in their local languages, following the same data collection procedures. The authors translated the data into English, and the interviewees' names were changed to pseudonyms to protect their privacy. Questions asked about recent experiences with news, entertainment, and technology. We approached a variety of interviewees using snowball sampling to reach a diverse range of social groups. For the Japan interviews, we invited men and women of all ages and with varied occupations, ranging from a housewife, an IT engineer, and a waste collector to a Manga illustrator, utilizing the networks of both the researchers and interviewees.

After the interviews were transcribed in the local languages, the researchers surveyed the data and chose topical themes, relevant theoretical concepts, and meaningful key words for further analyses with an open coding scheme. The PIs of each country discussed preliminary results of coding and agreed on a set of common codes according to possible thematic orientations following a grounded theory approach (Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss 1990). With the agreed codes, team members first tested coding schemes several times with interview data from the US, since English is understood by all members. All researchers employed the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA that enabled systemic and thorough categorizations and organizations of the qualitative data and ensure the analyses' reliability. Furthermore, each team undertook additional second and third rounds of coding.

During the qualitative, open coding process, which is broadly considered a method of induction to discover a new concept or mid-range theory, project members noticed 'gender' as a particularly salient and important theme in the Japanese data and further corroborated the analysis with the Foucauldian idea of modern, dispersed micro-level power. In this way, we achieved an interplay between existing theoretical frameworks and new findings and categories that emerged during the coding and analysis (Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2013).

This analysis aimed to identify contemporary patterns, tendencies, and inclinations among women's choice and use of media at home in an age of media saturation and connect them to existing conceptual global power frameworks. Table 1 illustrates the collected data and other relevant information, including global gender gap indices and digital technology proliferation.

[Table 1 near here]

In the following analysis, we split data into those from Japan and those from the other four countries. Coders, understanding the long-standing gender dynamics in Japan, discovered substantial gendered discourse on domestic media consumption; therefore, we used these data (including from male interviewees) to depict how gender relations are manifested in everyday choice and use of media in domestic settings in the digital age. The distribution of their age and gender among interviewees is shown in Table 2.

[Table 2 near here]

Thereafter, we organized the data into the three above-mentioned conceptual frameworks of power and drew on data from other countries to illustrate similar (or dissimilar) cases or features. A strictly comparative analysis was not employed, as it often too strongly emphasizes formulating overarching tendencies and patterns (Kaori Hayashi and Gerd G. Kopper 2014). However, by discussing research findings cross-nationally, we obtained deeper theoretical perspectives and implications for future research on gender and media consumption.

Results

In our interviews in Japan, women discussed their media choice and use in their everyday domestic settings distinctively from men. We analyzed Japanese women's descriptions of

how and why they choose and use media from the three sites of power.

Personal authority

From our interview data, we found that Japanese husbands and fathers generally have authority over their wives and daughters regarding how to choose and use old media. In one extreme case, a 41-year-old part-time worker, Azusa, said that her husband forbade her to watch television dramas at home. Instead, she watches them on her smartphone: ‘He has said repeatedly over the years that those who watch dramas are stupid, so it is difficult for me to watch one. I watch it on a very small screen as I fold the laundry or do other things.’ For Azusa, watching television on her smartphone is a way to avoid being ridiculed by her authoritative husband.

While old media are still seen as the domain for men’s decisions, women choose digital media and use it for themselves, but with interventions by and concessions for men, just as Azusa watches TV dramas on her smartphone. Azusa recounted when she was scolded by her husband for checking her smartphone while he was driving. Reina, a 21-year-old restaurant worker, said that she stopped using Facebook because her ex-boyfriend stole her password and photos. Although these cases are outliers, even among Japanese participants, we nevertheless encountered cases in our interviews in which men exercised outright control over women regarding media choice and use, whereas we did not find such cases wherein women controlled men’s media use against their will.

Male family members are often regarded as the ‘tech people’ in family settings, perpetuating the globally pervasive myth that science and technology are exclusively for men (Wajcman 1991, 37ff) ³. Hiroka, a 20-year-old student, used to watch YouTube videos on the

³ According to the UNESCO 2017 Global Report, only 3% of female students in higher education choose information and communication technologies (ICT) studies (UNESCO 2017).

TV until four or five years ago ‘because my father likes to try these things. He would show me how to do it [connecting the PC to the TV].’ However, Hiroka did not do this anymore because she uses her mobile phone instead. Meanwhile, Hitomi, 59, asked her husband or daughter to help set up and use her new device: ‘I am not good at many things, so I am a bit scared. That’s why I always ask my daughter or husband before I do anything.’ Hitomi uses search engines and works on her PC during the day and even reads news online rather than in print, which many of her male contemporaries still do in Japan. Nevertheless, she feels technologically inferior to other family members. These examples illustrate that many women in Japan believe that they need men’s help to understand technology and that technology should be controlled by men.

Outside Japan, similar cases were only observed in Israel in an ultra-Orthodox community. Zeev, 34, a Ph.D. student, explained his family situation in terms of his more privileged position regarding the Internet: ‘I am up-to-date with the news all the time. I log onto websites a few times a day—mostly Ynet and “The Shabbat Square” [an ultra-Orthodox news website]. Sometimes, my wife and I will talk about things that happened, but I tell her [about them], she doesn’t tell me as much. She is not as exposed to the Internet as I am because she has a kosher phone⁴.’ The gendered rules of the community in this Israeli case makes it difficult for women to benefit from technological innovation.

Importantly, Azusa’s case in Japan is not wholly representative of the media and news consumption and must be interpreted as an outlier of masculine domination. Nevertheless, our qualitative investigation captured such female experiences in Japan but no equivalent male experiences. In short interviews with a stranger, people usually discuss views they think are representative and socially acceptable; thus, we can conclude that masculine authority

⁴ “Kosher phones” are phones that have been restricted in some way to ensure that they cannot provide access to various apps and sites that are considered problematic (see Frieda Vigel 2018).

continues to be socially accepted and dominant over the choice and use of old and new media in Japan.

Media affordances

Men's hegemonic position over decisions on the choice and use of media functions not only within personal/individual interactions; it can also be indirect, subtle, and ambiguous, and largely structured in the relationship and interactions among users, technology, and appliances. Often, gendered biases and images are deeply ingrained into technologies and materiality (Cockburn 1985) and, thus, are projected onto each medium. In other words, the affordances of new technologies enable women to access more information and communication but often only within the dominant gendered framework of technologies and their related discourse (Hutchby 2001).

Our Japanese interview data showed that the print newspaper, the oldest type of mass media, is the most prominent example of a media device that functions as a site of masculine domination. Many of our over-50 female participants mentioned that they did not read newspapers because their husbands took them to the office. They claimed that they had long become used to doing without news(papers) because their husbands had always taken the physical paper to work. One 51-year-old housewife, Yurie, reported checking the news on websites and Facebook 'because I don't have access to a newspaper during the day...my husband takes it with him when he goes to the office...so I don't usually read it.' Nobuko, a 65-year-old housewife, used to subscribe to an online newspaper, paying 1000 yen (10 USD) extra, because her husband took the paper to work; however, she stopped because she seldom read it and now accesses free online news instead. In Japan, women over 50 years old seem to have adopted online news earlier than their male counterparts; yet, in these cases, online media were not necessarily a symbol of emancipation but a realistic solution to secure their

own news source. Women resort to digital devices to solve the uneven distribution of media. These examples show that women are early adopters who bring gadgetry into the home to improve and simplify their lives (Sarah Gibbard Cook 2012). These Japanese women are obvious examples of early adopters of ‘news on screens’ in the home for practical reasons.

Women also turned to digital devices/platforms, because they, unlike newspapers and television, require fewer negotiations with family members. Rikako, an unemployed single mother, said, ‘Usually the kids watch anime [on TV], so I check the news on the Internet.’ Overall, the Internet and social media seemed to be an arena to escape ‘living room wars’ (Ang 1996) in which the heterogeneity of social positionings among family members is at stake. This was also seen outside Japan. For example, Claudia, a 41-year-old psychologist from Buenos Aires, said, ‘My husband uses the television in the evenings to stay informed...and I use a lot of social media and information on the Internet.’

Gendered images seem to be embedded in digital outlets as well. In Japan, LINE takes on a gendered image and is regarded as an indispensable communication tool among Japanese women with its cute sticker functions and extensive networks for private and commercial communications. Aki, a 47-year-old translator, represented a good example: ‘I have a daughter. Anything about her [at school] is communicated via LINE [among mothers]. It’s an app, and if I don’t have it, I get ostracized [from mothers’ community]. I don’t like that type of thing, so I hesitated, but in the end, I couldn’t resist the pressure [to become] a member.’ The single mother Rikako acknowledged that LINE has become indispensable among mothers as well, although she refuses to use it: ‘I would always be told [by other mothers at school], “Why don’t you have LINE? If you have it, it’s easier to stay connected.”’ Nevertheless, Rikako would not possess a costly smartphone and continued to use emails and text messages for school communications, telling other mothers, ‘I don’t know how to use it.’ In Japan, single-parent households comprise less than seven percent of

total households with children, and almost 90 percent of single-parent households are single-mother households. Most single mothers in Japan subsist on less than half the national median income, the poverty line defined by the OECD (Yoshiaki Nohara 2018). Rikako, aware of her societal position, felt that she does not belong to “moms’ community” because she is not a LINE user, one of the most popular communication tools for Japanese mothers. In Japan, a smartphone is five to ten times more expensive than a flip phone.

While many women said LINE was essential for their everyday life, we encountered few men who regarded it as an important communication tool, even though they had it installed on their phones and used it regularly. Rather than its messenger function, almost all the references to LINE by Japanese men were to LINE news, an area in the app listing important daily news.

As shown above, specific social media platforms have acquired certain exclusive attributes for specific social groups in their material design and economic value. This exclusive aspect can also serve to invigorate information provision and exchange for specific purposes. Rikako said, ‘Yahoo! News makes it easy to search for my favorite keywords, so I look at a lot of stuff related to sexual assault and domestic violence.’ Ami, 59, a Tokyo-based interpreter, connected to overseas friends and closely followed Facebook’s news recommendations for gender-related items: ‘Currently, I am most interested in sexual harassment issues.’

Time and space

As seen in the case of newspapers, old media tends to support traditional gender relations in domestic settings. In a larger spatial context, the home is usually designed to place old media within traditional family relationships. Our Japanese research data showed that domestic space strongly and persistently structures women’s choice and use of old media, reinforcing traditional gender and family relations. Asako, a 44-year-old housewife

living with her husband, three daughters, and mother, said that she watches TV every morning for the weather forecasts but watches the program chosen by her children until they go to school. 'I watch Nittere (Nippon Television; Japan's largest terrestrial commercial television) because the kids keep watching it.... I always prepare lunch boxes for the kids or make breakfast, so I am on my feet all the time. I glance [at the TV], though, whenever something interesting comes up. But before the kids go to school, I can't sit [and watch it].'

Asako said she could only sit and read a newspaper with a cup of coffee after her kids went to school. In Japan, radio is often consumed within traditional gendered relations in domestic settings, too. Emi, a 48-year-old freelance photographer, said she does not listen to the radio very often: 'But my husband does, so it's always on. Regardless of whether it's the morning or the holidays, "News Asia" is always on while he's at home.' Finally, time is another element that structures women's media choice and use. For example, Yurie and Nobuko, whose husbands take newspaper copies to the office, said that reading newspapers was something they do only on weekends.

Many Japanese women do not actively choose their media at home because of a lack of time. Ayumi, who was working as a secretary at a university, said, '[VOD films] run for more than two hours, and then I cannot do any household chores, so I don't feel like watching [them].'

A 2019 survey from Japan's National Institute of Population and Social Security Research showed that in Japan, while husbands spent 37 minutes on average doing cleaning, cooking, and other housework on weekdays, wives spent 4 hours and 23 minutes (Nippon.com 2019).

Outside of Japan, we encountered similar statements regarding the use of old media: Elizabeth, a 30-year-old U.S. consultant said, 'Typically, [the television] is on in the background. I'm cooking dinner or doing something else on the couch...my husband watches it more. Sometimes he watches it, and I sit in the room and just listen while I do something

else.’ A 32-year-old market researcher, Jena, said that the television is on for ‘like four hours,’ while she prepares food for the coming week: ‘Sometimes, it’s on all day...but I think me just sitting on the couch watching TV, that’s not happening a lot.’ Thus, women, both in Japan and other countries, often associate television as a medium that is playing while they do other things.

Radio, too, could symbolize who dominates the intimate space. Idit, an 81-year-old retired lecturer from Israel, recalled, ‘When I drive with my husband, I have to hear news... coverage of things that I’m not interested in. But that’s the price of marriage. What can you do?’ Estela, a 59-year-old administrative worker in Argentina, wakes up with the radio ‘because my husband turns it on.’ In traditional ultra-Orthodox families in Israel, women avoided using smartphones and computers, instead using other types of media to accompany their chores. The most salient example was the household of 34-year-old Ph.D. student Zeev. Explaining his home media use, he also mentioned his wife’s conduct: ‘Actually, my wife listens a lot to “Nayes Lines” (automated phone lines used by ultra-orthodoxies to hear the news)...She doesn't have a smartphone and she won't open up a computer to watch the news, so while washing the dishes or while she's cleaning the house, she sometimes listens to it.’

As for time, even in Finland, where gender equity is most advanced among the countries investigated in our study, women complained about the lack of time for media and news consumption. Kaarina, a 28-year-old historian from Finland, said, ‘If I wanted to spend more time on social media, my child would need a babysitter.... It is something that I can’t simply change in any way other than not spending time with my child.’ Interestingly, we did not find equivalent statements from men, even though we also interviewed men with small children.

In summary, domestic spaces are often designed to make it easier for women to do household chores efficiently, and women’s time flow is structured to prioritize family

errands. Decisions over where to place a television set, where to charge the iPad, when to watch a film etc. are made under such premises. In other words, gendered micro-power is deeply embedded both in time and space at home. It is difficult to overcome this altogether because time and space provide the foundation of our daily routines and support the existing value system.

Discussion

Our investigation reveals that old media, including print newspapers, television sets, or radios, are not only vehicles that purport news, information, or entertainment, but also work to maintain, mediate, and reproduce the domestic patriarchal structure.

In the past few decades, it has been argued that increasing access to digital technologies has changed aspects of individual and family lifestyles. However, our study shows that the old media at home remain both symbols and symptoms of traditional gender relations, particularly in cultures such as the Japanese, where traditional gender norms dominate, with some men exercising straightforward authority over women. More importantly, from the perspective of media studies, the affordances of old media such as print newspapers, TV sets, and radios, tacitly assume men's dominance over media use at home and support traditional gendered divisions of labor. Furthermore, in many Japanese households, reading print newspapers, watching television, or listening to the radio constitutes a substantial part of everyday lives, and these actions often perpetuate a family's traditional patriarchal power structure. For example, in Japan, reading a newspaper in the morning on weekdays is not only a practical action to consume the news but also a symbol of men's power to access the newspaper before other family members.

Such dominant gendered arrangements regarding domestic choice and use of 'old' media are further projected on the uses of emerging new digital devices and/or platforms.

Women recounted that they had come to use their preferred digital media, such as smartphones and tablets, to counter the compromises, sacrifices, or losses they made for their partner or family members. In other words, these digital devices/platforms are often chosen for complementary uses to fill needs that were not met by old devices. In this regard, for women, the use of newer digital media is tacitly based on masculine values and assumptions, perpetuating micro-level power long exercised over women. While acknowledging that the control of information technologies yields freedom and power for women, as recent global #MeToo movements show, what this paper demonstrates is that digital media in women's everyday use are still oscillating between freedom within the confinement of micro-level masculine control and the possibility of 'a freedom beyond' (Chun 2006: 250). The interview data from Japan depicted those new media technologies that were often applied for concessions to the ubiquitous gendered micro-power at home rather than emancipation from patriarchy. In this regard, further research could examine whether these findings are taking place in a transitional stage in the early 21st century, in which old media are being rapidly and vastly replaced by new digital ones, and/or whether changing constellations in the media ecosystem may help produce new dynamics at home and in society, leading toward a more gender-equal society.

While we have emphasized the persistent gender imbalance of media choices and use at home in Japan, we acknowledge that lifestyles of both women and men in Japan are undergoing substantial changes due to globalization and digitization. In this paper, out of the eleven Japanese women we quoted, nine were in their forties or older. Therefore, further longitudinal studies on the future of media choices and use are necessary among women as well men in their twenties and thirties who may have different norms and images of gender roles at home. This way, we can discuss more intensely how social changes and generational factors are at work..

Our study also identified how men and women talk differently about their own media experiences. Men generally did not attend to gendered occurrences or gender relations in media consumption, particularly in Japan. The Japanese men said little about gender-related media use; to them, everyday media use is something they take for granted. The women, on the other hand, testified to differences, inequities, and injustices. Here, again, the idea of power is at work: We see the unequal distribution of privilege regarding domestic media choice and use, and the silence of Japanese men is one significant consequence of this unequal distribution of power. Perceptions regarding media use are so deeply embedded into their microscopic daily routines that it is rare for male family members to recognize that power and resource inequity is at play, let alone connect these routines to larger social justice issues. Outside Japan, it was only Zeev, an Orthodox Jew in Israel, who consciously described everyday media use with his wife at home.

Future challenges in the global context

This comparative study suggests gendered media use was more pronounced in countries like Japan, where traditional gender roles are widely accepted.. In countries with more advanced gender norms, we found that ordinary citizens do not explicitly talk about gendered media use. The majority of our interviewees in Argentina, Finland, Israel, and the US may not have acknowledged the idea of ‘gender-biased media use’ unless they felt inconvenienced or saw injustice in their daily media use or are part of specific communities with differing norms about gender relations. Alternatively, some may simply be reluctant or embarrassed to talk about such issues to a stranger due to their normative bindings. Both cases suggest that gender-based, if not biased, media consumption needs to be disembedded from our unconscious, highly mundane routines in the process of interviewing in different social and cultural contexts.

This clear imbalance in the data related to gendered media use among different cultures poses a methodological challenge in cross-national research. The gulf between the explicit results of gendered media use in Japan and other nations requires an additional deeper insight into how people understand their gendered roles in their media consumption behaviors, how they conceive of them normatively, and how they speak about them. This means that we need to interpret qualitative audience/user data with feminist/gender perspectives carefully, particularly in advanced industrial nations where norms of gender equity seem to be taken for granted by the majority of the population. Though some of the statements we quote in this paper may not be heard frequently in all the countries, such as those made by a single mother in Japan or the ultra-Orthodox Israeli family, we were able to collect these voices and shed light on the gendered media consumption that exists globally through the lens of gender injustice in Japan.

In this respect, this cross-national study, conducted by scholars in five nations with highly different gender policies and cultures, also has clear merit. We contend that our findings on gendered media choice and use in our everyday lives could only be detected through constant comparisons among different cultural and social standings and perspectives across the world. The cross-national comparative method can be employed to reveal views that are difficult to see and voices that are difficult to hear if one remains within one society.

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Table 1. Outline of each country’s interviews and profiles.

| | Argentina | Finland | Israel | Japan | US |
|---|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Number of interviewees | 158 | 100 | 82 | 77 | 71 |
| Period of interviews | Mar 2016 to Dec 2018 | Mar 2018 to Feb 2019 | Jul 2017 to Jan 2019 | Jun 2017 to Jul 2018 | Jan 2017 to Oct 2017 |
| Average interview duration (min) | 33 | 50 | 52 | 48 | 45 |
| Global Gender Gap Index ranking 2020 (out of 153 countries) (World Economic Forum 2020) | 30 th | 3 rd | 64 th | 121 st | 53 rd |
| % of individuals using the Internet, 2017 (ITU 2018, 84–85) | 71.0 | 87.5 | 81.6 | 90.9 | 76.2 |
| Mobile-broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, 2017 (ITU 2018, 82–83) | 78.1 | 153.1 | 105.1 | 133.2 | 132.9 |

Table 2 Gender and demographic distribution of the 77 interviewees in Japan

| | Female | Male |
|-----|--------|------|
| 20s | 8 | 11 |
| 30s | 5 | 13 |
| 40s | 8 | 3 |
| 50s | 9 | 4 |
| 60s | 7 | 6 |
| 70s | 2 | 1 |