

## Gazed representation: Analysis of gender portrayal in Hindi and English music videos

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### Abstract

The study based upon content analysis, mainly compares gender representations through male gaze, framing, and camera lens in Indian and European music videos from year 2009 to 2013. It is an analysis of sixty music videos, thirty from each industry, comprising the top six chart busters from each year of the chosen time frame. The theoretical framework of this research is embedded in the nexus of Laura Mulvey's male gaze and "looked-at-ness". It observes the sexual depiction of lead characters through dressing style, on-screen gender presence as well as gender representation in popular music videos. Findings reveal that Hindi songs were shot with stronger male gaze slant as compared to American/British songs and more screen time was given to females in both music industries yet individually, Hindi songs were more centralized on female leads. Both Indian and European music videos featured females in provocative sexual apparels while displaying seductive behaviors, while majority of singers/heroines were barely or semi-clad yet males were usually fully dressed in almost all observed songs. Results also reveal that most of the songs were sung by male singers/leads but the focus of the videos remained primarily on female characters and their bodies. This study provides an important approach for future researchers, as the manufactured reality of gender through the contemporary Eastern and Western music industry is strikingly different from the real gender trends and practised culture in the respective societies, which needs to be further investigated in the context of globalization.

**Keywords:** *Gender portrayal; Gazed representation; Music videos - Hindi, English.*

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## **Introduction**

Our gender perceptions and ideals are produced through many sources, it can be from the family, society, through cultural norms or in more modern times, they can be learnt from the media. While traditional media has played an important role in gender construction and perception, the role of modern media is still somewhat of a riddle. At the same time, it is becoming more and more pertinent to understand the influences of media in modern world due to its impact and effects. Undoubtedly today media has become our main source of entertainment and information and in the popular genre of the days, music, is also playing an important role (Yocum, 2010). Music is a significant part of modern life and is also used as an agent of socialization, identity formation, escape and taking control on one's emotional state especially in youth culture (Roe, 1985; Leming, 1987).

Music videos, comparatively a new medium, were developed in 1980s as a tactic used by many celebrities for promoting and marketing their work as well as constituting their "star appearances". All this played a phenomenal role in music video production and gender representations (Grebb, 2006). Quite handy in their nature, music videos, containing explicitly strong sexual images of women can be traced back to the long tradition of popular music and performers.

Music videos promote our cultural values and how we treat gender so it should be investigated on wider grounds. Music videos have swayed the ideologies and ethical norms of youngsters. Alexander (1999) in her research points out how the leading young generation creates, critiques, and recreates young women's self-identity after seeing the images of women presented in music videos.

The glittering lives promoted in music videos are exceptionally unrealistic including the destructive themes related to sexual objectification of women, sex, control, violence, fashion, rich life style, money and fame. Music lyrics and music videos can be the communicative of ideas related to gender and sex and these ideas later on influence young viewers and listeners (Seidman, 1992). Analysis of sexual images within the context of music videos ultimately convey and contribute how youngsters especially females perceive themselves as human beings (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Arnett, 2002; Jhally, Killoy, & Bartone 2007).

Twentieth century has witnessed feminist ideology working as an emancipating power to liberate women from patriarchal society. It has been significantly influencing almost all the areas of media studies. It is not only deeply concerned about the gender perception of media consumers, scholars and journalists but it has also influenced almost all forms, images, genres and narratives of media culture industry (Watkins & Emerson, 2000).

The present study aims to investigate the changing trends over the last five years in Indian Hindi film songs and American/British pop songs according to the "Male Gaze Theory" of popular film theorist "Laura Mulvey". The conceptual framework is clearly based on Mulvey's theory that was presented in 1975 when dominant protagonists in Hollywood movies were mostly males. Although Mulvey introduced it basically as a film theory but its scope is not only limited to specific age or medium so very significantly it can be applied to other genres too. Very often, the theory is used in appraisal of advertisements, television and fine arts.

Mulvey believes that women are mainly serving as the object of gaze and never the possessor of it. They are objectified in film because heterosexual men are in control of the camera. According to her, it is the patriarchal society that affects us deeply and also goes on to shape our cinematic experience. She argues how the film conforms to our culturally determined perception of different genders. Women are generally used to give men a gratifying visual experience and this gratification can be achieved in two ways. 1) By objectifying the woman and 2) By identifying them with the represented characters. Mulvey presented an interesting overview how the representation of female characters in media in general, and in Hollywood films in specific satisfy the needs originating from the Freudian Ego.

Essentially the "gaze" of media is masculine. Russell (1994) stated, "The sexual objectification of female is ....a staple of mainstream movies, ads, records covers, songs, magazines, television, art cartoon, literature, pin-ups and so-on. It influences the way that many males learn to see women." From a feminist point of view the relation between gazed and gazer was never established on equal terms. 'Gazer' is more demanding, selfish and want 'gazed' to act according to his expectations. Jonathan Schroeder (1998) while talking about the concept of Male Gaze voiced his opinion as "to gaze implies more than to look at it

signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which gazer is superior to the object of gaze”.

In the present article Indian Hindi film songs and American/British English pop songs have been selected to analyze which industry is cashing more on the idea of male gaze and to-be-looked-at-ness, so that the level of male centrality in popular medium in 21<sup>st</sup> century can be gauged. The research also analyzes the role of women as a sex object and as a commodity used to sell the product i.e. music.

### **Literature review**

In media, the cultural depictions of gender or male/ female connections have a long-term quality. Definitely the representation of male has always been a dominant and powerful one while females are projected as powerless creatures who frequently try to amuse, delight, entertain, gratify and flatter men folk with their sexuality. No doubt, this has been a popular and approved theme in popular music culture too. (Millett 1970, p. 81; Papadopolous, 2010)

Critics (Jhally, Killoy, & Bartone 2007) have investigated music videos for their misogynistic images and messages. The dominant discourse of the music videos is to promote and reproduce the misleading philosophies about the role and sexualities of women. In-depth analysis reveals that women in music videos are used as an eye candy only and are being a victim of male gaze or otherwise ignored as a person.

Music videos represent the patriarchal structure of femininity through their suggestive lyrics, expressing satisfaction and fulfillment of male desires. Scantly dressed women involved in provocative body moves, inciting choreography and most of all camera angels serving to invite male gaze to its maximum. (Dibben, 1999)

The Objectification theory by Fredrickson and Robert (1997) supports the claim that from a general perspective, the basic use of women in media is seen for their physical appearance based on their attractiveness to the general public. The said claim, in accordance with music videos, is fully verified through content analysis that shows women in music video are supposed to use their bodies to sexually arouse the male, almost always.

A study conducted by Sommers-Flanagan et al. (1993) found

that a significantly higher percentage of women compared to men were used in Western music videos to sexually arouse the viewer in various different manners such as twerking, lip licking, caressing one's body etc. It is seen that dancing by women in music videos is tailored more to be for a seductive purpose rather than entertaining one for the eye pleasure of major population of the male viewers. A study conducted by Seidman (1992) also found that the percentage of the females partaking in music videos wearing sexually arousing clothing is higher than that compared to their male counterpart.

Similarly, research by Frisby & Aubrey (2012) observes how famous music artists promote the idea of sexual objectification in their music videos. A thorough content analysis was performed in order to obtain the assessment of sexual objectification within the various genres of music videos including rock, country etc. in the light of race discrimination. The procured results revealed that black musicians were 50% more likely to be seen wearing sexually provocative attire in music videos. The lowest percentage of sexual objection was found in the genre known as country due to the discreetly respective nature of this genre. The genres pop and R&B (hip artists) were found to have a very minor number of differences in their portrayal of sexual objectification.

The fact that trendy music and sex have a close connection can be explored by studying the work of musician's in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as in those times the popular music of jazz and blues gave deep messages of sex. For example, the popular work of Elvis, Little Richards and others. The years following 1950 showed a drastic increase of sexual content within music video's studies conducted during that period. They deduced that 40% to 75% of music videos contained sexually explicit content. Modern studies as well as past studies both support the claim of increasing and prominent sexual themes, objectification and disregard of moral ethics. (Arnett, J, 2002).

On the other hand, analysis of music videos, which centralize around a certain theme, have found that more than 50% of them contain banned content such as alcohol or drug usage, sexually suggestive material, as well as containing acts of violence performed against women who are being represented as a commodity and sometimes depicted in a pejorative style (American Academy of Pediatrics, 1996). This current trend of music videos has become spectacularly popular among the youth and thus has a very powerful psychological effect which is quite

alarming because of the fact that music videos have now become a thriving source of underage substance abuse, sexism and hazardous sexual behavior.

Likewise studies conducted on American/British cultural images have also shown a focus mainly on the traditional images of gender and sexuality of music videos as an extremely popular form of entertainment among the youth. Kalof (1999) revealed that these music videos mainly focus on sexual innuendo and gender stereotypes and the youth, in particular the female teenage population have found common grounds with these music videos. Further research found that exposure to typical American/British culture that include R-rated music videos, films, crime dramas influences the general attitude of the viewing audience towards things such as the increased acceptance of rape myths, positive effects of violence against women and stereotypic gender role attitudes.

Ananya Sensharma (2007) analyzed mainstream Indian film songs in the light of Laura Mulvey's famous "Male Gaze and to-be-looked-at-ness." The researcher designed her study to check if Mulvey's argument is applicable to Indian songs or not. She found a strong evidence of male and female gaze but it was mainly dominated by male gaze.

Conclusively it can said that increasingly similar and repetitive behaviors (stereotypical usually) towards both sexes has culminated to an arraigning degree due to exposure to sexual images, cultural beliefs, violence against women and even eating disorders. Today the society perceives the degree of masculinity of its male counterparts through their sexual prowess and experiences. Due to this, many sexual acts are considered to be sexual conquests rather than intimate moments between two people (Papadopolous, 2010, page 60).

The above stated literature does establish that men are dominant and women are submissive, mainly used as an eye candy in popular music videos, secondly reinforcement of patriarchal culture is observed in the music industry and lastly the quoted studies indicate that females in such videos are solely meant to sexually arouse and satisfy men through their actions and gestures. Much debate has been done on women's objectification in music industry, therefore, in the light of the above findings and Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory, a coding

sheet has been developed through which the researchers aim to analyse chart buster music videos from India and America, in order to determine the dominant trends of male and female portrayal in the global music industry.

The assessment parameters include dressing style, given screen time to lead characters from both genders, and the types of male gaze (through lens, framing and camera) in Indian Hindi film songs and American/British pop songs.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to analyze popular feminist film theory in the context of male gaze concept from Laura Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* and relate it to the contemporary practices in popular Indian and American/British music videos. The designed content analysis aims to determine the modern cinematic conventions in Bollywood and American/British mainstream music industry when it comes to phenomena of male gaze and portrayal of female leads.

Previously a lot of research has been conducted in regards to Laura Mulvey's male gaze and cinema, yet a contemporary analysis and especially in the sector of music videos does not exist. Moreover the highlight of the study is a cross comparison between the observed male gaze trends in Indian versus English songs. The results will help academicians, filmmakers and the society at large to understand the present culture of male and female representation in global music scene, especially in terms of female objectification.

### **Research questions**

In the light of the above literature and Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory; the following research questions have been developed:

- 1) Overall how much screen time has been given to male and female leads in Hindi versus English songs?
- 2) What type of costumes do male and female leads wear in Hindi and English songs?
- 3) Is there any difference in costumes worn by female leads of Hindi and English songs?
- 4) Is there any difference in male gaze of leads and extras in Hindi and English songs?

- 5) Is there any difference in level of male gaze through lens, framing and camera in Hindi and English songs?
- 6) Is physical projection different for lead female characters in Hindi and English songs?

### **Methodology**

**Data collection:** Focus of the study was film and pop video songs, hence content analysis was chosen as the method of data collection. This study has employed both the qualitative and quantitative approach in order to analyze the chosen songs.

**Sample:** The universe was most rated Hindi and English video songs from Bollywood films and International pop music industry respectively. The data source for Hindi songs was Times of India & Box Office India, whereas the list of English songs was acquired from U.S. Billboard Chart. An initial sample of top ten songs was taken from 2009 to 2013 (Annexure-C provides a list of the top ten Hindi and English blockbuster songs from the year 2009 to 2013). Then for each year, 6 songs were randomly selected out of that pool of 10 songs, Hindi as well as English, therefore a total of 12 songs every year. All in all, sixty songs were studied through the designed coding sheet.

**Tool development & coding the content:** A coding sheet was developed for the content analysis. The tool was developed on two constructs; male gaze through the character and male gaze through the lens/camera. Items like male lead watching female and point of view shots of males/females, were used to measure the presence of male gaze through characters' eye.

Similarly, the construct based on male gaze through lens was comprised of items like shot divisioning: close up of male/ female and scene revolves around male/ female. Four categories were included to record costume types, worn by the lead characters; barely clad, semi-clad, figure-hugging and fully dressed (The attached protocol sheet Annexure-B details the used terms and their meanings).

**Data analysis:** The units of analysis were the scenes of the songs, which were 627 in totality. Among them 332 scenes were decoded for the observed thirty Hindi songs and 295 scenes for the thirty English songs. The coding sheets were decoded into SPSS software and in light of the set research questions, parametric tests,



independent and paired sample t-tests, were applied to find out significant and non-significant differences in the observed data.

### Observations and interpretations

This study's main objective was to determine the contemporary gender portrayal trends in Hindi and English songs under the light of Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory. The song sequences of the top rated Bollywood and US Billboard videos from 2009 to 2013 were coded so that the elements of male gaze could be analyzed. The components of gaze were studied for both male and female leads.

**Research question 1:** Overall how much screen time has been given to male and female leads in Hindi versus English songs?

**Table 4.1. Overall time distribution for male and female characters in Hindi and English songs**

	M	N	SD	t	df	Sig
Time given to males	10.62	627	13.413	-5.83	626	0.000
Time given to females	14.27	627	16.876			

**Interpretation:** A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the overall time given to males and females in Hindi and English video songs. There was a statistically significant difference between the time given to males ( $M = 10.62$ ,  $SD = 13.413$ ) and females ( $M = 14.27$ ,  $SD = 16.876$ ),  $t(626) = -5.83$ ,  $p < .0005$  (two tailed). The increased mean of time given to females indicates that females in all the videos were shown more than males. The eta squared statistic (0.05) demonstrates small effect size.

**Table 4.2. By overall time distribution for male and females characters in English songs**

	M	N	SD	t	df	Sig
Time given to males	10.20	295	13.879	-3.163	294	0.002
Time given to females	13.98	295	17.820			

**Interpretation:** A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the overall time given to male and females in English song videos. There was a statistically significant difference between the time

given to males (M = 10.20, SD = 13.879) and females (M= 13.98, SD= 17.820),  $t(294) = -3.163$ ,  $p < .0005$  (two tailed). The increased mean of time given to females indicates that females in all the videos were shown more than the presence of males. The eta squared statistic (0.03) demonstrates small effect size.

**Table 4.3. By Overall time distribution for male and females characters in Hindi songs**

	M	N	SD	t	df	Sig
Time given to males	10.99	332	12.994	-5.544	331	0.000
Time given to females	15.29	332	15.992			

**Interpretation:** A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the overall time given to male and females in Hindi song videos. There was a statistically significant difference between the time given to males (M = 10.99, SD = 12.994) and females (M= 15.29, SD= 15.992),  $t(331) = -5.544$ ,  $p < .0005$  (two tailed). The increased mean of time given to females indicates that females in all the videos were shown more than the presence of males. The eta squared statistic (0.08) demonstrates small effect size.

**Research question 2:** What type of costumes do male and female leads wear in Hindi and English songs?

**Table 4.4. By overall distribution of dress codes of males and female main characters in Hindi and English songs**

	M	N	SD	t	df	Sig
Female Dresses	2.34	499	1.430	13.729	498	0.000
Male Dresses	1.39	499	0.879			

**Interpretation:** A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the dressing of male and females in Hindi and English song videos. There was a statistically significant difference between the dresses worn by males (M = 1.39, SD = 0.879) and females (M= 2.34, SD= 1.430),  $t(498) = 13.729$ ,  $p < .0005$  (two tailed). The increased mean for female dresses indicates that females in all the videos were shown scantily clad somewhere between semi clad and figure hugging dresses. Male were between full dress and figure hugging dresses. The eta squared statistic (0.274) demonstrates

large effect size.

**Research question 3:** Is there any difference in costumes worn by female leads of Hindi and English songs?

**Table 4.5. By comparing dresses of female characters in Hindi and English songs**

Female Dresses	M	N	SD	t	df	Sig
Hindi	2.44	332	1.324			
				0.049	625	0.961
English	2.44	295	1.462			

**Interpretation:** An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the dresses of females in Hindi and English songs. There was no significant difference in scores for Indian songs ( $M=2.44$ ,  $SD= 1.324$ ) and English songs ( $M=2.44$ ,  $SD=1.462$ ,  $t(625) = 0.049$ ,  $p = 0.961$ , two-tailed).

**Research question 4:** Is there any difference in male gaze of through character, leads and extras, in Hindi and English songs?

**Table 4.6. Difference between Hindi and English songs by male gaze through character (male lead and extras)**

Male Characters gazing female	M	N	SD	t	df	Sig
Hindi	3.99	332	2.266			
				5.682	625	0.000
English	2.98	295	2.194			

**Interpretation:** An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the level of male gaze through the male characters present in Indian and English songs. There was significant difference in scores for Indian songs ( $M=3.99$ ,  $SD= 2.266$ ) and English songs ( $M=2.98$ ,  $SD=2.194$ ,  $t(625) = 5.682$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in mean s was small (eta squared = 0.05).

**Research question 5:** Is there any difference in level of male gaze through lens, framing and camera in Hindi and English songs?

**Table 4.7. Difference between Hindi and English songs by male gaze through lens/ camera (close up etc.)**

Male gaze through lens	M	N	SD	t	df	Sig
Indian	14.46	332	10.262	5.338	573	0.000
English	10.80	295	6.691			

**Interpretation:** An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the level of male gaze through lens/ camera in Indian and English songs. There was significant difference in scores for Indian songs (M=14.46, SD= 10.262) and English songs (M=10.80, SD=6.691,  $t(573) = 5.338$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in mean s was small ( $\eta^2 = 0.04$ ).

**Research question 6:** Is physical projection different for lead female characters in Hindi and English songs?

**Table 4.8. Comparison of female physical projection in Hindi and English songs**

Female body projection	M	N	SD	t	df	Sig
Indian	3.00	332	2.276	0.864	625	0.381
English	2.86	295	2.600			

**Interpretation:** An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the projection of female bodies in Indian and English songs. There was no significant difference in scores for Indian songs (M=3.00, SD= 2.276) and English songs (M=2.86, SD=2.600,  $t(625) = 0.864$ ,  $p = 0.381$ , two-tailed). Mean score 3.00 and 2.86 shows the more projection of female bodies. Zero was used to show no projection, 1 projection of male bodies, 2 projection of male & female bodies both and 3 for projection of female bodies only.

### Discussion and conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the current trends in Indian Hindi film songs and American/British English pop songs videos through the lens of Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory. Supported with literature and investigated through this very study, it is evident that females are given much more screen space and time as compared to male leads in both Indian and American/British songs.

An inferential statistical analysis of European English pop songs

revealed that many of the songs were sung by males but the majority of the videos focused primarily on the female characters and their bodies. Similarly in the Indian Hindi film songs, female projection is the same yet majority of the songs are sung by as well as picturized on females too while male leads and extras are there just to support the heroine. Individual analysis of both industries reveals a higher mean in terms of the time given to females in Hindi film songs (15.29) as compared to time given to females in American/British English pop songs (13.8) per scene.

For the analysis of costumes worn by male and female leads, four continuous levels were developed where nudity to lingerie worn by both genders was categorized under "barely clad", characters wearing short tops/vests and miniskirts/trunks were classified under "semi clad", while the other two categories included "skin tight clothing" and "fully dressed". A paired sample T-test was applied on the data and the results revealed a statistically significant difference between the dresses worn by both genders. This reaffirms the previous study conducted by Seidman (1992) who yielded similar results, concluding that women are made to expose more than men in entertainment media. In the current study, male lead characters were found to be usually fully dressed and sometimes wore skin tight attire while majority of the females in lead were scantily-clad and occasionally semi-clad. Some Indian songs also portrayed males to be fully dressed up even while swimming. It was observed that male extras in Indian songs were usually in white or light coloured dresses while females wore red or bright colours to catch the attention of male audiences. One thing, here, is worth mentioning that the same dresses of males and females does mean their equal level of body projection. The results brought out the fact that even then females were far more physically projected in the music videos.

It is an established fact that eastern and western societies are quite different in terms of values, tradition and culture. Apart from the ethical issues or the debate of right and wrong, the discussion is more about the equality of gender in all aspects. No matter, worn by a female or male, revealing dresses may not be a big deal in the Europe but in a conservative Indian society, discrimination among male and female dressing is quite evident. Indian females are usually covered much more than males but in the analyzed songs, the researchers found no significant difference between the dresses of females in Indian and American/British songs. Both the industries pictured females in flimsier/ revealing or figure hugging

attires and that too in a quite seductive manner. So this finding directly leads the study to the reconfirmation of the basic notion of male gaze, which Laura Mulvey mentioned in 1975.

On the other hand, an analysis of gaze through male characters shows high scores for the said Indian songs as compared to the observed American/British ones, which means that Indian songs are majorly designed and shot for the pleasure of male leads. This reaffirms the concept of Objectification theory by Fredrickson and Robert (1997) and thus Bollywood or the Hindi Film Industry is found to be more inclined to objectify women than European music industry. At the same time, this is quite a surprising finding, as the usual viewer perceives Western artists and media to be more sexually representative of women in their media. (Sommers-Flanagan et al, 1993).

It can also be observed that in Indian songs, most of the time females looked towards the camera in such a way as if inviting the audience to gaze at them. Meanwhile male characters watched into the camera as if asking male audiences to gaze at the female body, in a quite "look at her, how sexy she is!" manner. To assess the difference in male gaze through the camera, the music videos were observed through camera angles and shot divisioning for each scene. The results indicate that Hindi songs are shot on a more cinematic male gaze approach rather than English songs. It is a general observation that not a single shot is left without a girl in focus in the Hindi songs while the close-up shots of male is only meant to show their hands, mostly moving on semi-naked bodies of females. This validates the study of Dibben (1999) who claimed that camera angels serve to invite male gaze to its maximum and that is exactly what is being practiced in Hindi music videos.

A statistical comparison of female physical projection in Indian and American/British songs indicates no significant difference as body imagery of leading women is almost the same in both industries yet the mean indicates a slight more seductive role of females in Hindi videos as compared to English music videos.

Though the applied statistics over-all revealed a small effect size yet the individual analysis of both media industries further reinforce the observed trend. The small effect size is probably because in a larger context, more or less all song videos in India or elsewhere are of the same kind with minor differences.

This research did not include audience analysis therefore gaze of male audiences was not taken into account. Yet through a general observation, it was found that dozens of male extras in Indian songs were cast primarily to gaze at female lead character and dance along them.

Mainstream cinema and music industry has been a representation of modern as well as global prevalent culture. Hence portrayal of popular images is one of its fortes. The present study dealt with the Mulvian concepts of female portrayal in modern media as applied to Hindi and English song sequences. It is not surprising that Mulvey's male gaze does exist even today in both Eastern and Western music industries, yet interesting is the minor difference between the female portrayal in these industries.

### **Limitations and future implications**

This study is limited to observation of male gaze by character and camera only, while the audience gaze was not included. Therefore in future studies, a survey questionnaire tool can be used to assess the audience gaze in terms of gender representation in popular media that will give an insight into the practical implications of the current observed trends through this study. Secondly, female gaze was not observed and the sample size was restricted to sixty songs from the last five years. For future researches, it will be interesting to see a cross comparison of male gaze and female gaze in this perspective.

The yielded results through this study attempt to provide an important approach for future researchers, as the observed trend are in fact manufactured reality of gender produced through the contemporary Eastern and Western music industry, that is strikingly different from the real gender trends and practiced culture in the respective societies and it is pertinent to further investigate them in the context of globalization.

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