

Globalization and Youth Culture in Kazakhstan: Postcolonial and Gender Aspects

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Abstract

This paper is focused on initial quantitative research into the impact of the internet, media, popular culture, and computer games on the construction of youth culture and gender roles in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. Our research has revealed that there are local, regional, and global considerations regarding the students' preferences in those realms. In this study, it was indicated that Russian context and influence has spread throughout both the internet and media and is reflected in the students' interests; while a more global perspective has become widespread in popular culture. Although local Kazakh aspects are also present in those spheres, their representation is insufficient. Additionally, it was argued that the internet, media, popular culture, and computer games greatly contribute to the construction of gender identity and sometimes gender equality in the young people of present-day Kazakhstan.

Key words: youth culture, gender construction, globalization, post colonialism, popular culture, Kazakhstan

Introduction

Youth studies in Central Asia started in the early 21st century after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the spread of postcolonial studies and globalization (Appadurai, Benhabib, Anderson, Arnett). Kirmse pointed out that the following frameworks applied to the youth in post-Soviet Central Asia: 'transition', postcolonialism, nation-building and 'Islamic revival' (2010: 381). Accordingly, it would be possible to state that post colonialism has encountered global challenges and experiences

regarding the construction of identity and nation-building, in which the youth absorb notions and can reinterpret new ideas more successfully than adults. It has been confirmed by Kirmse that the youth inhabit 'plural worlds' and 'are often at the forefront of global cultural exchange' (2010: 390). This study concentrates on the gender construction of young people in post-Soviet Kazakhstan by means of the Internet, media and popular culture and how local, regional and global aspects have been integrated into this process. Under globalization, Western culture and values (American and European) have been examined. Although currently globalization has many ethnic aspects including those from Asia, Western influences were recognized in the research as the modes of modernization taking place in Kazakhstan, which have greatly influenced the creation of Kazakh youth's hybrid identity. Regional aspects include, first of all, the impact of the Russian media, which has become ubiquitous on the Internet and on television in the nation. Other regions such as Turkey, South Korea, and India are also mentioned in the study as having varying degrees of prevalence. In other words, Asian context in the media and on television is also significant for Kazakhstan and Central Asia. However, local aspects principally correspond to the Kazakh content.

Both youth and gender construction have social and cultural aspects (Kirmse 2010, West & Zimmerman 1987, Marshall & Young 2006). According to West and Zimmerman, "doing gender is unavoidable" (1987: 137), so the main goal of the pilot research regarding youth and gender construction is to show how changes have become unavoidable because of the Internet, media, television, and popular culture in Kazakhstan.

While most of the work and articles on youth in Central Asia are tied to the post-socialist authority gap in general (Blum 2007, Roberts 2010, etc.) or focused primarily on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Kirmse 2010, 2013; Ibold 2010; DeYoung 2010; Roche 2010; Stephan 2010), this study will pay close attention specifically to Kazakhstan. Compared to other commonly viewed studies addressing young people in Central Asia in terms of religion, media (Kirmse 2010, 2013), post-Communist

space, social institutions and processes (Roberts 2010), this pilot study on Kazakh youth focuses on the Internet, cultural identity (Ibold 2010), higher education, globalization (DeYoung 2010), and Islamic education (Stephan 2010). The current research considers how modifications in gender identity and construction in Kazakhstan are related to complex local, regional, and global influences and also indicates from where those influences emerge. How is the youth's gender being fabricated by the Internet, social networks, media, television, and popular culture? How is the hybridity of young people being created through globalization, locality and regionalism? Is it possible to develop some Kazakh cultural content which would embrace the Internet and media space with popular culture (Adams 2008)? What should we pay attention to in this case? Is it possible to build a kind of 'Kazakh/Kazakhstani hybridity'? What does such hybridity represent?

Methodology

It is necessary to note that this is a pilot study, so there should be further studies to verify the accuracy of the results. While conducting this study, the primary goal was to identify some basic strategies to study young people in Kazakhstan in the future regarding gender issues, globalization and local/regional contexts, as well as student preferences in media and popular culture. This pilot research on youth and gender construction was conducted in November 2011. It was a small quantitative study carried out with only 20 Russian-language students between the ages of 18 and 21 years (7 males (35%) and 13 females (65%)) in Karaganda city. The questionnaire was completed with the help of students who assisted considerably in the correction of the questions, and subsequently made some useful additions. As a result, the final worksheet included 31 questions and could be divided into four parts as follows: 1) Internet and social networks; 2) media and television; 3) movies and music (or popular culture), and 4) computer games. It is also important to note that few of the students involved in the study preferred using the Internet to watching movies and shows; enjoyed listening to music as well as to communicating and conducting educational research.

Having the opportunity to do various activities from any location and whenever wanted, and being able to discuss and communicate with friends and/or relatives through social networks or chats were revealed as reasons for the widespread use of the Internet. It could be determined that currently, Internet usage has been increasing in urban areas of Kazakhstan.

This paper includes virtually all of the inquiries posed in the pilot research on youth culture in Kazakhstan. There are seven questions regarding the Internet and social networks; fifteen items on media and television; five questions on popular culture, and the final three questions pertain to gadgets and computer games, for a total of 30 questions analyzed in those spheres. Additionally, it should be noted that students included in the study were from different scholastic years and included sophomores, juniors, and seniors from diverse fields such as humanitarian, technical, and medical.

Fieldwork

As stated above, the pilot study on youth and gender construction consists of the following four parts: Internet and social networks; media and television; popular movies and music; gadgets and computer games. Presented are the ensuing results from each of those realms:

Part one: Internet and social networks

This part includes the following questions (each question has the certain table below):

1. Which social networks do you use?
2. What arouses your interest in social networks?
3. Which chat programs do you use?
4. What do you use the Internet for?
5. Have social networks taken the place of email for you?
6. Which tools do you use for online communication?
7. How often do you use the Internet?

Table 1. Which social networks do you use?

What social networks do you use? (several variants) N=20		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Moi Mir (My World, Russian)	7 (100%)	13 (100%)
Facebook	3	3
Vkontakte.ru (In Contact)	2	7
Odnoklassniki.ru (Classmates)	2	5
Vkrugudruzei.ru (In the Circle of Friends)	-	1
Twitter	1	1
Nur.kz	1	1
Mirtesen.ru (The Small World)	1	-
Do not use social networks	-	-

Table 2. What arouses your interest in social networks?

What arouses your interest in social networks? (range from 1 to 8: 1-most important and 8-least important):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
News	2.9	4.2
Communication with friends	3.1	2.1
Chat communication	4.0	3.5
Friends' news	4.4	4.7
Group communication	4.6	4.2
Searching new friends	4.6	5.8

Pictures/video/music exchange	5.4	4.9
Blogs	6.3	6.1

Table 3. Which chat programs do you use?

Which chat programs do you use? (several variants):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Mail.ru Agent	7 (100%)	13 (100%)
Skype	4	8
Facebook	1	2
Yahoo	1	2
Yandex.ru	1	-
Odnoklassniki.ru (Classmates)	1	-
ICQ	-	1

Table 4. What do you use Internet for?

What do you use the Internet for? (several variants):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Communication	6	11
Information	6	11
Education	4	11
Movies/telecasts	4	8
News	4	7
Music	2	5

Work	2	3
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Table 5. Have social networks taken the place of email for you?

Have social networks taken the place of email for you?		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Yes	2	7
No	0	3
Sometimes	4	3
Other	1	0

Table 6. Which tools do you use for online communication?

Which tools do you use for online communication? (several variants):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Social networks	6	11
Chats	3	6
Microblogs	3	7
Forums	2	1
Conferences	1	3

Table 7. How often do you use the Internet?

How often do you use the Internet?		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Every day	5	12

Several times a week	1	1
Other	1	0

Regarding the findings of this part, it could be determined that female students use the Internet mostly for communication (with friends, in groups and chats); while male students firstly prefer to view the news and then to communicate. Such differences between the two genders reveal why social networks have mostly replaced email for young women. Also, Internet space represents some gender equity when young men and women use the Internet for communication, searching for information and educational purposes. The Internet has become an integral part of the everyday life of young people.

Part two: Television and media

This part of the pilot study is more complicated than the others and contains 15 questions. The regional (Russian) content sometimes represents Russian versions of Western shows; for example, Russian Top Model, which is the equivalent to America's Next Top Model. In this case, I have separated these shows according to regional and international content. It is important to take into account that television and media offer a considerable number of global, regional and local options by means of programs, television networks, newspapers, and magazines. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that few students preferred watching TV shows online at a suitable time for them. The remaining questions and tables are as follows:

8. Which TV channels do you prefer to watch?
9. Which Kazakh channels do you watch?
10. Which Russian channels do you watch?
11. Which foreign channels do you watch?
12. Which music channels do you watch?

13. Which movie channels do you prefer to watch?
14. Which sport channels do you watch?
15. Which scientific-popular channels do you watch?
16. Do you watch any thematic channels?
17. Which soap operas do you watch?
18. What kind of reality shows do you watch?
19. Do you watch dance shows?
20. Which music shows do you prefer to watch?
21. Which comedy shows do you watch?
22. Which newspapers and/or journals do you read?

Table 8. Which TV channels do you prefer to watch?

Which TV channels do you prefer to watch? (several variants) N=20		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Russian	6	10
Kazakhstan	3	8
European	2	6
American	1	5
Turkish	-	1
Do not watch TV	-	1

This table demonstrates some equal proportions of male and female preferences concerning regional, local and global television.

Table 9. Which Kazakh channels do you watch?

Which Kazakh channels do you watch? (several options):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Khabar	3	6
Kazakhstan	3	4
KTK	4	7
NTK	2	6
Astana	1	2
El Arna	1	4
31 st channel	1	8
The Seventh channel	0	4
Local (Karaganda) channels	2	3
I do not watch Kazakh channels	2	0

Table 10. Which Russian channels do you watch?

Which Russian channels do you watch? (several options):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
The First channel (CIS)	1	5
NTV	4	5
RenTV	1	4
Russia	5	4
RTR	0	2
Vesti 24	2	0

Culture	2	1
TNT	2	1
CTC	1	2
NTV-plus	1	0
Premier	1	0
TV 3	0	1
TVC (TV Center)	0	1
I do not watch Russian channels	0	1

Table 11. Which foreign channels do you watch?

Which foreign channels do you watch? (several options):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
CNN	0	1
BBC	2	8
Fox Crime	1	1
Fox Life	1	5
DTV	1	1
Euronews	2	6
Others	1	1
I do not watch foreign channels	2	2

These three blocks on Kazakh, Russian and international channels show diverse frames among young males and females as well as indicate preferences of news channels regarding male and entertaining ones concerning female students.

Table 12. Which music channels do you watch? (several variants):

Which music channels do you watch? (several variants):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
MuzTV (Russia)	4	12
MTV	3	9
MuzZone (Kazakhstan)	2	6
RU TV (Russia)	1	8
MCM (Europe)	1	-
Bridge TV	1	4
Hit TV (Kazakhstan)	1	5
Music of the First channel (CIS)	-	2
Do not watch music channels	1	1
I listen to music in the Internet	1	2

Table 13. Which movie channels do you prefer to watch?

Which movie channels do you prefer to watch? (several variants):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
TV 3 (Russia)	4	7
AXN Sci Fi Ru	1	-
TV 1000	1	7
TV 1000 Action	1	3
Fox Life	1	4
Nashe Kino (Our Movie, Russia)	-	1

DIVA Universal	-	2
TV 1000 Russkoe Kino (Russian Movie)	-	2
India TV	-	4
Comedy TV	-	3
Others	3	1
Do not movie channels	2	-
I watch movies online	2	3

Table 14. Which sport channels do you watch?

Which sport channels do you watch? (several options):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Fighter (Boets, Russia)	5	1
Sport (Russia)	4	4
Eurosport	2	6
KZ Sport 1	1	2
Extreme Sport Channel	-	1
Do not watch sport channels	1	6
I use Internet for watching sport channels	1	1

Tables 13 and 14 present the gender bias where masculinity is constructed with sport and action movies as well as femininity is highlighted by TV shows and dramas.

Table 15. Which scientific-popular channels do you watch?

Which scientific-popular channels do you watch? (several options):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
National Geographic	4	6
Discovery Channel	2	5
Discovery Science	2	4
Discovery World	2	5
Nat Geo Wild	2	1
Animal Planet	2	5
Viasat History	1	1
365 Dnei (365 Days, Russia)	1	2
Others	2	0
I do not watch scientific-popular channels	1	2
I watch such channels in Internet	0	1

This table represents some gender equality among young people. The most probable explanation is their educational and cognitive purposes for watching such channels.

Table 16. Do you watch thematic channels?

Do you watch thematic channels? (several variants):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Sovershenno Sekretno (Top Secret, Russia)	1	2
Auto Plus (Russia)	1	-
Okhota i Rybalka (Hunting and Fishing, Russia)	1	1

Zdorovoe TV (Health TV, Russia)	-	3
Kukhnya TV (Kitchen TV, Russia)	-	2
Telecafe (Russia)	-	1
24 Techno (Russia)	1	-
Fashion TV	-	8
Style	-	3
Assyl Arna	1	1
Do not watch thematic channels	4	4

Thematic channels demonstrate that female students have interests related to fashion and health; while males prefer action, autos and techniques.

Table 17. Which soap operas do you watch?

Which soap operas do you watch? (several options):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Interny (Interns, Russia)	6	6
Univer (University, Russia)	4	7
Real'nye Patsany (Real Guys, Russia)	4	6
Lie to Me	2	3
House	1	3
Vampire's Diaries	-	5
Defoliation (Turkey)	-	2
Dangerous Love (Turkey)	-	2
Ezel (Turkey)	-	1

Others	5	7
Do not watch soap operas	-	2
I watch soap operas on the Internet	-	2

This table shows wide diversity regarding soap operas for both male and female students. It should be noted that only females chose Turkish segments.

Table 18. What kind of reality shows do you watch?

What kind of reality shows do you watch? (several options):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Posledniy Geroi (Last Hero, Russia)	2	1
Pust' Govoryat (Let's Talk, Russia)	1	6
Dom 2 (Home 2, Russia)	-	2
America's Next Top Model	-	11
Russian Top Model	-	6
Cosmetic Make Up (Muz TV, Russia)	-	6
10 Reasons to Fall into Love (Russia)	-	4
Janice Dickinson Modeling Agency	-	3
Invitation to Home (Muz TV, Russia)	-	2
Room Raiders (MTV)	-	3
Let's Get Marry (Russia)	-	2
Extreme Makeover	-	2
Zhar-Zhar (Kazakh)	-	1
Others	-	2

Do not watch reality shows	3	-
I watch reality shows on the Internet	1	1

Reality shows present an interesting fact; all female students involved watched programs regarding fashion, style and relations.

Table 19. Do you watch dance shows?

Do you watch dance shows? (several options):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Tansty na L'du (Dances on Ice, Russia)	-	9
Tansy so Zvezdami (Dance with Stars, Russia)	-	8
Tanstui do Upadu (Dance to Exhausted, Russia)	-	1
I watch dance shows in the Internet	-	1
Do not watch dance shows	7 (100%)	3 (23.1%)

Table 20. Which music shows do you prefer to watch?

Which music shows do you prefer to watch? (several options):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
SuperStar KZ	-	6
Novaya Volna (New Wave, Russia)	-	5
Fabrika Zvezd (Stars' Factory, Russia)	-	4
Narodnyi Artist (People Artist, Russia)	-	2
Fabrika Zvezd (Stars' Factory, Kazakhstan)	-	1
ProjectorParisHilton (Russian)	-	1

Do not watch music shows	7 (100%)	5 (38.5%)
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The two tables obviously demonstrate the gender gap among male and female students' preferences. Men ignored dance and music shows and Women were inclined to view them.

Table 21. Which comedy shows do you watch?

Which comedy shows do you watch? (several options):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Comedy Club (Russia)	6	9
Nasha Russia	3	7
KVN (Club of Joyful and Inventive, Russia)	3	10
Nasha Kazakha	2	5
Kazakh KVN	1	1
Daesh' Molodezh' (Let's Youth, Russia)	1	-
Do not watch humor shows	-	-
I watch humor shows on the Internet	-	1

Comedy shows represent another area of gender equality, in which both males and females preferred watching entertaining broadcasts.

Table 22. Which newspapers and/or journals do you read?

Which newspapers and/or journals do you read? (open question):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)

Republican (in Kazakh and Russian languages)	5	3
Domestic (city, oblast')	4	5
International	1	1
Russian	1	11
University newspaper	-	1
Do not read newspapers and journals	2	2

Note: Male students noted four media related to autos and sports; female students specified eleven magazines for women.

This part of the research demonstrates that there is broad diversity among local, regional, and global content, which Kirmse suggested calling a 'marketplace for styles and identities' (2010: 390). It could be inferred that Russian regional context has been complemented by Turkish and Indian aspects, while the local (Kazakh) segments are minimal and are underrepresented in music channels/shows, sport channels, comedy shows and media. Russian television channels are more numerous and more diverse than Kazakh and international television.

Considering gender construction, we could see that television and media play a significant role in building gender identities among students. Masculinity is shaped by sports, science, news, auto, hunting, and fishing channels. On the other hand, femininity is shaped by fashion, style, health, and cooking channels, as well as mode, cosmetic, dance, and music reality shows. It is important to note that all male students preferred to watch soap operas while all females preferred to watch reality shows. These aspects are crucial in gender construction in young men and women, so special attention must be paid to developing local content of reality shows and soap operas for the youth in

Kazakhstan. Some gender equality in preferences of comedy shows on television and other media watched by both male and female students was noted.

Part three: Popular culture (movies and music)

This part of the pilot research included 5 questions related to movies, music and idols. It should also be mentioned that four of the five questions are open-ended and have local, regional and global aspects:

23. What are your favorite movie genres?
24. What are your favorite movies and/or cartoons?
25. Which movies or cartoons have you seen recently?
26. Who are your favorite singers or musical groups?
27. Who are your idols?

Table 23. What are your favorite movie genres?

What are your favorite movie genres? (several options) N=20		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Comedy	5	10
Adventure	5	6
Thriller	3	4
Criminal drama	3	4
Action	2	4
Scientific fantastic	2	1
Drama	2	11
Horror	2	6
Hitman	3	3

Fantasy	1	4
Romantic comedy	1	9
Black comedy	1	-
Art-house	-	2

Table 24. What are your favorite movies and/or cartoons?

What are your favorite movies and/or cartoons? (open-ended question for titles):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
American/European	31	47
Russian	1	4
Kazakh	2	-
Turkey	-	1
Different (many)	1	1
Total:	35	53

Table 25. Which movies or cartoons have you seen recently?

Which movies or cartoons have you seen recently? (open-ended question for titles):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
American/European	5	13
Russian	1	1
Do not remember	1	-

Table 26. Who are your favorite singers or musical groups?

Who are your favorite singers or musical groups? (open-ended question for names and titles):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
American/European	18	31
Russian	9	21
Kazakh	2	5
Different (many, changeable)	-	3
Total:	29	60

Question 27: Who are your idols?

Only slightly more than 50% of the students identified their idols. The rest of the participants told us that they had no idols. It can be inferred that those students have become more individualized and independent. Should we consider that aspect as an effect of globalization on the youth of Kazakhstan?

Four of seven male students identified 6 idols in total (all men):

- 2 scientists;
- 2 artists;
- 1 sportsman;
- 1 poet.

Seven out of thirteen female students acknowledged 7 idols in total (5 women, 2 men):

- 5 artists;
- 2 models (Heidi Klum, Tyra Banks).

This part of the research clearly demonstrates that global popular culture has a significant effect on the students included in the study. At the same time, it could be mentioned that Russian content is

evident in students' music preferences. Furthermore, movie genres and idols have a considerable influence on gender construction in male and female students.

Part four: Gadgets and computer games

The final piece of the research contains only three items on using electronic devices to have access to the Internet, TV, movies and music, as well as the students' preferences in computer games. This section covers the following questions:

28. Where and how do you use the Internet?
29. Besides the Internet, what means do you use to watch TV shows and movies or listen to music?
30. Which computer games (platforms) do you play?

Table 28. Where and how do you use the Internet?

Where and how do you use the Internet? (several options):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Home	6	10
Mobile phone	5	10
University	3	10
Friends	3	5
Relatives	2	3
Internet café	2	1
iPad	0	2

Table 29. Besides the Internet, what means do you use to watch TV shows and movies or listen to music?

Besides the Internet, what means do you use to watch TV shows and movies or listen to music? (several variants):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Satellite TV	4	5
Cable TV	2	10
Digital TV	0	1
ID TV	0	3
DVD	0	1
Others	0	1
I do not use anything	0	1

Table 30. Which computer games (platforms) do you play?

Which computer games (platforms) do you play? (several options):		
	Male (7)	Female (13)
Contra-Strike	4	1
RPG	4	0
Strategies	4	2
Sport competitions	3	0
Poker	2	0
Action	1	0
Stimulators	1	0
“Shooting”	1	1
Adventures	0	1

I do not play computer games	1	11
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This section of the research shows that using cable, mobile phones and satellite TV to access the Internet and watch TV is common among both male and female students. Computer games clearly depict the gender differences.

Conclusion

As a result of the study, it should be mentioned that globalization has given more autonomy to young people; helps them access the world's diversity; encourages them to strive for financial independence and experiments with plurality (Kirmse, 2010). Moreover, it motivates them to join the new middle class in Central Asia (Roberts, 2010). Additionally, the Internet offers new opportunities, but it also leads to risks for youth in Central Asia (Ibold, 2010).

Television, printed media and popular culture were included in that research as well as the Internet and social networks considered by Western scholars for the study of gender construction in the youth of Kazakhstan. It was discovered that all the aforementioned segments (Internet, television, popular culture, and computer games) influence the gender identity of young people and even offer some gender equality corresponding to a few parts of the Internet and television spheres. It could be determined that the regional (Russian) content has a dominant position in the Internet, media and television in influencing students' preferences. Globalization prevails in popular culture although Russian content is significant for the music preferences of young people in Kazakhstan. Local and regional diversity in television and popular culture is not very prevalent; however, we can see some Asian content (Turkish and Indian) in these two segments. The local (Kazakh) content was represented in the first three parts of this pilot research, but it is at a minimal level.

For further research regarding the youth in Central Asia and Kazakhstan, it would be highly advantageous to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches to better understand

and study the demographical aspects of contemporary youth culture, such as ethnicity analyzing language, class, urban/rural background, gender and sexuality. It would also be better to extend the geography of future research to include all of Kazakhstan and Central Asia to be able to compare different regions in the territory. Additionally, it is important to note that it would be useful to pay attention to developing the following local segments of youth culture such as news, soap operas and reality shows, as well as studying computer games and cartoons respectively. These segments could help us a great deal in building some competitive local cultural content for youth in the media of Kazakhstan. Studying the youth in the country would allow us to know how to successfully develop the local cultural content to be competitive with regional and international content, and how to build some ‘Kazakh/Kazakhstani hybridity’ in the postcolonial period, and then integrate it globally.

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