



MAY SEAH
 may@mediacorp.com.sg

BLONDES don't have more fun. Bad girls do. Pamela Andersen, Shannen Doherty, Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan — they've all thrived, at some point, on having a "bad girl" image.

Laverne, Shirley, and Dr Quinn, Medicine Woman, have been replaced by girls who care more about their Manolos than their halos.

All the girls in *Gossip Girl* are bad girls — even the mom. *America's Next Top Model* is only fun to watch if one of the models is a real bitch. Emo chicks, biker chicks, dominatrix chicks — throw a stone and you'll hit a bad girl in the Western media circles.

Why, then, are there so few Asian bad girls, especially here in Singapore? Can you even imagine Jeanette Aw or Felicia Chin knocking back cough syrup, buying lacy lingerie, or — horrors — cutting a queue?

BORN TO BE MILD

Here in Asia, it's the pure, virginal and demure "good girl" who is lauded in the media and worshipped by fans. Think Lin Chiling, Nanako Matsushima, Fann Wong, and Michelle Chia — all "hot" because they're so very "girl-next-door" (although we've never had neighbours like them).

The closest you might get to a local "bad girl" is MediaCorp artiste Fiona Xie, who, by her own standards, isn't bad at all — even though she is known to love a good party or two. Or three. "I don't think there's a bad or good; it all depends on your benchmark," Fiona told TODAY.

"I don't consider myself a bad girl — I think I uphold a lot of values. I just like to push the boundaries in terms of experiencing

Who's afraid of the big, bad gal?

Must our Asian girls be 'good' all the time?



Girls gone wild: (From left) Blake Lively from *Gossip Girl*, Pamela Anderson and Paris Hilton are free to live it up on TV — but not Asian girls, so it seems. GETTY IMAGES, AP

or trying out controversial stuff. I like to embrace new things and new ideas. I definitely defy convention."

CONVENTION CONTENTION

Speaking of convention, the sentiment against bad girls probably has something to do with the fact that Asian culture places heavy emphasis on homogeneity within society. "Bad girls" are "rebels" and their behaviour is socially, sexually and morally "deviant".

Little Nonya actress Cynthia Koh, who's had a lot of experience playing bad girls in Channel 8 dramas, reckons that the Asian society is still a very conservative one.

"When the aunties and uncles watch (a drama on Channel 8), they're really into the character. They think you are like that in person," said Cynthia. "They've said to me, 'Oh, you're so naughty in that show — why you like that?'"

"I think it's because we're a more judgmental society. Asians have such set codes of behaviour," said actress, host, and all-around strongly-opinionated woman Wong Li-Lin.

"In Asia, how you behave reflects a bigger picture, or reflects onto the family. We are more likely to label right and wrong; good and bad," said the Fly Entertainment artiste.

ALL RIGHT FOR WHITES?

Singaporeans don't mind Western bad girls — in fact, we rather like them on TV. We relish reading about them in magazines. We even dress like them (when they have their clothes on). So why is it that it's the *Asian* bad girls we have a problem with?

How come the Asian community raised a ridiculous brouhaha over pictures of Zhang Ziyi sunbathing topless with her fiancé on a private beach, but didn't even bat an eyelid when Amy Winehouse was topless for what seemed like a month on a

public beach in the Caribbean? Do we like our angmohs naughty and our Asians nice?

As an Australian, Gillian Arnold, director of the drama *Red Thread* which is coming soon to Channel 5, thinks that bad girls in the West are "just a sign of the times".

"These girls want to be heard. When they create controversy, everyone listens," she told TODAY.

"They are a part of the complex and imperfect tapestry of Western society, and we accept them. In Asian dramas, on the other hand, the women are good people with good virtues. They play a vital role in sending clear messages about family values and strong family ties."

IT RHYMES WITH 'HEX'

Perhaps it has a lot to do with one little word: Sex.

Associate Professor Norman Li, an evolutionary psychologist at the Singapore Management University who studies mating and attraction, thinks so.

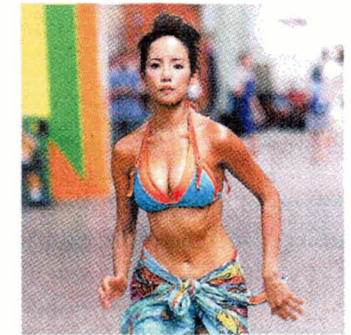
"Generally speaking, men distinguish between women as either long-term romantic partners or short-term casual sex partners.

"For long-term mates, men not only want a physically-attractive partner, but also one who's kind, intelligent, stable, trustworthy, personable, et cetera.

"These numerous qualities are desirable because they all play a part in a successful long-term, cooperative venture that may involve jointly raising a family."

For short-term satisfaction, however, it's all about looks and a lack of inhibition. "Bad girls" are especially popular in any setting where short-term mates are desirable," Prof Li continued.

"So, it is possible that their



Fiona Xie doesn't think she is as 'bad' as she's made out to be.

TODAY FILE PHOTO

popularity in Western but not Asian media can be attributed to a much higher prevalence of short-term, casual sex going on in Western cultures than Asian cultures.

"Yet, at the same time, people here can admire the naughty, sexy, and wild angmoh woman from afar because it is understood that those women hail from a place that serves a different mating approach."

PATRIARCHY LIVES ON

So, does it all boil down to male attitudes towards women?

The 19th century Victorians classified women into two categories: Angel or whore. You either stayed in the house and took care of the babies, or you traipsed the streets swigging cider and propositioning men. There was no middle ground on which a woman could stand.

Could the sad fact be that despite years of "progress" and women's lib, there are still only two choices open to women: Bad girl or good girl?

On television, the bad girl is a vampy seducer of other women's men. She flaunts her sexuality and uses it to get what she wants. And she also gets what's coming. Good girls smile demurely without showing teeth.

Guys, how many girls do you know fit in either category?