

The Strength to Resist:
The Media's Impact on Women & Girls
Study Guide

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The Study Guide

Uses of the Film

This study guide accompanies the 33 minute documentary *The Strength to Resist: The Media's Impact on Women & Girls*. The film looks at the toxic and degrading messages imbedded in the images of girls and women that dominate the media and the risks that these messages pose to both mental and physical health.

The film goes beyond merely analyzing the issues and aims at developing in the viewer critical thinking skills, an ability to resist media manipulation, and a commitment to activism. The video presents the ideas of several leading authorities in the fields of psychology of women and girls, eating disorders, anti-racism, violence against women, and media literacy, all of whom focus on potential long term solutions.

The film has been used by schools and colleges, as well as professional and community groups, to look at women's representation in the media and its impact on gender roles from such perspectives as health, gender studies, sociology, media literacy, psychology, and teacher education.

Study Guide Content

The study guide is designed with two populations in mind: students from middle school through high school, and college students and other adults. Although Section 2 focuses on the adolescent and Section 3 on the adult viewer, you may find ideas,

questions and activities in each that can be used with both of these age levels.

Although the film looks primarily through the lens of gender, the issue of race and racism is critical to understanding the role and impact of media images of girls and women. We have devoted Section 1 to this topic. We think you will find it useful to read Section 1 as well as the curriculum that is appropriate for your age group and to incorporate the ideas and some of the suggested questions in your discussions.

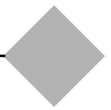
Section 1 — “*Looking Through the Lens of Race*”

by Valerie Batts, Ph.D.

In order to more effectively analyze the implicit messages of contemporary media, Dr. Batts (who is featured in the film) highlights some of the differences between the overt racism of the first half of the 20th century and the “modern racism” of today. This section also includes questions that will help students analyze aspects of institutional racism and oppressive biases in the media, and provides some suggestions for ongoing activism

Section 2 — “*Using the Film with Middle and High School Students*” by Linda Mizell

This section includes a series of questions and activities developed to help adolescents think critically about the ways in which they are influenced by the images they see every day. It includes activities to support students’ healthy resistance to the media’s narrow definition of what is “good, right and beautiful” in its depiction of body types, relationships and cultural images.



Section 3 — “Using the Film with College Students and Adults” by Gail Dines, Ph.D.

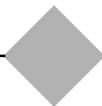
In this section, Professor Dines (who is featured in the film) explores in depth the issues she addresses in the film: our image-based culture, the ideology of images, pornography, body image and resistance to media images. Her teaching points and the accompanying activities encourage a complex analysis of the media’s affect on gender relations and violence against women, as well as the influence of corporate consolidation of the media and the drive for profit on the images produced.

Section 4 — “The Voices of Girls” by Jamila Capitman and Briana Deutch

In this section, two teenage girls offer their thoughts on issues such as racism, make-up, weightism and the importance that strong women role models have made to each of them personally in keeping their “voices” at an age when many other girls are losing theirs.

Section 5 -- *Additional Essays and Curriculum*

We have included (1) a special curriculum designed by media educator, Cheryl Hirshman, for girls 10 to 12 years old, (2) an essay by playwright and director Deborah Lake Fortson about using the voice (as in acting or singing) as an alternative to athletics as a resistance strategy, (3) an essay by psychologist Teresa Mok on images and stereotypes of Asians in the media and (4) a humorous and scathing look by Noy Thrupkaew at online marketing to women.



Section 6 — *Additional Resources*

A brief listing of additional resources and materials which are available to supplement this guide are included in this section. A more extensive listing, as well as opportunities to comment and share insights are all included online at

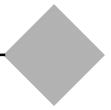
www.cambridgedocumentaryfilms.org

where you can click on the link for *The Strength to Resist: The Media's Impact on Women & Girls*.

Study Guide Contributors

Valerie Batts, who is featured in the film, is a licensed clinical psychologist and is the Executive Director of VISIONS, Inc., a consulting firm with a focus on cultural diversity, multiculturalism and issues of oppression. Since 1975, Dr. Batts has provided consultation and training nationally and internationally to human service providers, psychotherapists, educators, clergy, and private sector managers in a variety of areas. She has written several articles on modern racism and multicultural organizational change strategies and is the author of *Modern Racism: New Melody for the Same Old Tunes*.

Linda Mizell is a writer and educational consultant who has worked extensively with schools, colleges, and other organizations on the creation of multicultural, anti-racist institutions. She is the author of *Think About Racism* (a text for young adult readers) and a number of articles on anti-racist teaching practice. Among her curriculum projects are the award-winning Teacher's Guide to the PBS series *Africans in America* and a literature-based language arts curriculum for a Southern urban



school district. Mizell is a doctoral candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Gail Dines, who is featured in the film, is an Associate Professor of Women's Studies and Sociology at Wheelock College. She is the author of *Gender Race and Class in Media* and *Pornography: The Production and Consumption of Inequality*. A staunch advocate for media literacy, Professor Dines lectures across the country about the hidden codes and conventions of advertising and the pervasive themes of violence against women.

Jamila Capitman, who is featured in the film, is an eighth grader at Cambridge Friends School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She is interested in drama and has acted in several amateur productions in the Cambridge area. Jamila also enjoys soccer, dance and socializing with her friends.

Briana Deutch is also an eighth grader at Cambridge Friends School. She likes to write, play soccer and hang out with friends. Briana is active in several organizations concerned with issues of social justice.

Looking Through The Lens of Race

by Valerie Batts, Ph.D.

Why is it important to explicitly name race in a discussion of the impact of the media? Clearly, media images have become the central form of communication for most young people in the United States. Our country is based on the assumption that “White is Right and West is Best.” The media has been a primary carrier of this message. The video, *The Strength to Resist: The Media’s Impact on Women & Girls* begins to challenge this assumption, and this discussion of race and racism is an attempt to deepen that challenge.

Talking about race and racism is often difficult for teachers. Many white teachers fear saying or doing “the wrong thing.” Others practice “color blindness” and claim to treat everyone the same — usually the same as other white middle class children — thus ignoring the impact of racism on many of their students’ lives.

Many teachers of color believe racism will always be a factor and that talking about it won’t make any difference. Each of these positions, though understandable, actually keep us from using our power as teachers to get young people to think critically about their world so that they may become advocates for real and lasting social and economic change.

We need a common language to find our voices and empower our students and ourselves. Educators need to understand what talking about

these issues brings up for them, personally, before they begin group discussions with other teachers or with students. To assist in this self-understanding, personal reflection questions have been interspersed *in italics* throughout this article.

Developing a Common Language

Racism is “a system of advantage based on race.” It is created and sustained on 4 levels:

- Personal (individual thoughts and feelings)

- Interpersonal (individual behavior in relation to others)

- Cultural (values, definitions of beauty, preferred modes of thought and communication — what’s “good, right, beautiful and normal”)

- Institutional (rules, practices, laws, histories, power structures of society and its institutions)

NOTE: The difference between personal and interpersonal racism is the “acting out” of biases. The difference between cultural and institutional racism is that the prevailing values and culture of the privileged are legitimized and institutionalized. It becomes an institutional “acting out” of held beliefs.

Racism Defined

Many people associate racism with people holding prejudiced ideas or acting toward another person in a prejudiced way. We all have individual biases and prejudices, but racism in the United States goes further than individual acts of bias or meanness. When we talk about racism, we are talking about a system of advantage based on race. It is sometimes

defined as “prejudice plus power.” It is the ability of one group — white people — to define what is the “right” way of doing things, what is “normal”, what is “beautiful” or “good” coupled with the power of institutions, organizations, and government to put in place policies, procedures, and practices that give advantage to whites.

Questions for teachers: How have you defined racism up until now? Which levels of racism (personal, interpersonal, cultural or institutional) do you feel most able to identify? Which are more difficult? What feelings do you notice as you discuss these aspects of racism?

“Old-fashioned” Racism

“Old-fashioned” racism refers to overt acts of racism at the personal, interpersonal, cultural and institutional levels:

Personal racism (Example: believing that blacks and other people of color are inferior)
Interpersonal racism (calling people racist names)
Cultural racism (seeing black culture as “less than” or impoverished)
Institutional racism (Jim Crow laws)

Such types of racism were the “law of the land” in many parts of the United States throughout our history and remained in the Southern region until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Institutional racism results in the targeting of certain groups to receive fewer of society’s resources. This means

that the chances for their success are less, and the chances of success for the privileged group are better.

In advertising, examples of old-fashioned racism include symbols of black women such as Aunt Jemima or the lack of black women in ads altogether. Aunt Jemima was a television commercial and advertisement character that represented a stereotypical image of black women who served as domestic workers for whites. She was a typically loved character who was not supposed to be smart, beautiful or powerful, but sweet, lacking in sensuality and loving at all times. Women of color from Asian, Latina and Native American communities were virtually non-existent in advertising but, when included, were uniformly stereotypical.

As an African American woman growing up in the South in the 1950's, I experienced old-fashioned racism in its interpersonal, cultural and institutional dimensions. By the time I was in graduate school in 1975 at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, the social psychology literature was suggesting that racism had all but disappeared in this country. What was disappearing was old-fashioned racism (although studies show that 25% of people still hold old-fashioned racist views), and something new and harder to pin down was taking its place.

Questions for teachers: What feelings and images does the word "racist" conjure up for you first? As you reflect on this question and the section above, do you tend to think first about racism in terms of its "old-fashioned" form?

“Modern Racism”

“Modern racism”, by contrast, uses non-race related reasons for denying equal access to opportunity.

“It’s not the blacks, it’s the busing I object to,” is one common refrain. *“It’s not that we don’t want to hire people of color, but we need qualified applicants,”* is another.

When my daughter and I were exploring how decisions are made about which models are used in commercials, she was told by advertising agency representatives that the cornrows she was wearing might be seen as “too ethnic.” The underlying assumptions of this opinion are all examples of modern racism.

- ◆ It assumes that white consumers will not find beauty in a particular black woman’s style. It does not provide them an opportunity to stretch their perspectives about what is “right and beautiful.”
- ◆ It assumes that consumers from all backgrounds share this bias. For too long women and men of color have been trained to disregard the standards of beauty traditional to our group or cultural heritage and to feel a need to strive for white images.
- ◆ It defines what is beautiful in European “ethnic” terms. This is as damaging to people of color as is the stereotypical image of the “mammy” and to whites as is the stereotypical image of the “china doll”.
- ◆ And finally, it begins to create an image of what is beautiful that is so narrow that very few can see themselves, unless they strive to be white-looking Asians, Blacks, Latinas or Native Americans.

As Gail Dines points out in the video, the media is controlled by a few U.S. corporations who make profits globally from the marketing of this narrow perspective of beauty. All of us become victims of this media imaging and, over time, lose touch with the fact that very few people of any racial or cultural group look like what is on the television or movie screen. This distortion of reality for economic gain is cultural and institutional racism at its most extreme...and it is happening all over the world.

Question for teachers: If you are European-American in heritage, have you ever thought of yourself as looking “ethnic”? How does this alter your perspective? If you are a person of color, what are images of beauty in your culture?

Internalized Oppression

As people of color, we struggle to hold diverse images of ourselves in a country that still communicates through its media that “white is right” and white images are what sell. Against this barrage of white images, we have to remind ourselves to value the normal and natural ways that we look, dress, talk and walk when we are not attempting to assimilate into white culture. This pressure to assimilate and the racism we face when we do not sometimes causes us to devalue these and other expressions of our natural selves — a reaction described as “internalized oppression.”

In its modern form, internalized oppression is when people of color, as “targets” of oppression, engage in behaviors and beliefs that undermine ourselves and our community. It is when we seem to collude in our own oppression and it often hap-

pens on a level that is quite unconscious. When we choose a white doctor over a doctor from our own cultural group because we think the white doctor is probably more qualified — that is internalized oppression at work. When we lighten our skin or get cosmetic surgery because we believe that our skin or features are not beautiful as they are — again, that is internalized oppression.

Internalized oppression is inevitable, given the intensity of racism, and is first and foremost a “survival strategy”. In the slavery and Jim Crow days, smiling, agreeing with the white man, and acting “simple” meant that you could live another day, both literally and figuratively. It was a functional response to racism. It was self-preservation. It is still difficult to avoid these “traps” of behaving in ways that used to be effective as survival mechanisms, but have now out-lived their usefulness. We can bring these behaviors into our awareness and then seek support from others in our community to practice “letting go” of internalized oppression behaviors and find new strategies for getting our needs met in the world.

↑ What are 3 steps we as individuals can take to challenge

Questions for teachers of color: What are some examples of the misinformation we have been taught about ourselves as people of color? What are some of our behaviors that limit our success that we need to address? What are some personal reflections on the concept of internalized oppression?

Questions for white teachers: Think about an area where you may be a “target” of oppression — due to gender (female), class (working class or poor), language (English as a second language), age (youth or elderly), physical ability (disabled), sexual orientation (gay/lesbian) etc. What are some behaviors or beliefs that limit your success that might relate to internalized oppression?

So what can we do about racism in the media?

So what can we do? We educate ourselves. We engage in the dialogue. We come to recognize our biases as well as our buying practices. This includes recognizing the ways in which we have come to accept current media images of beauty as ideal. We need to develop a strategy for confronting racist and “Westernist” images in our personal lives as well as in our families and communities.

We can choose not to purchase materials or products that add to personally unhealthy and economically debilitating outcomes. We can write media executives, advertisers, and government officials to make our positions clear. We can organize to support programs that promote media literacy, both locally and globally. We can object to gender and racial stereotyping wherever it occurs.

And, as we view *The Strength to Resist*, we can use the following questions both with our peers and with our students to explore the impact of race on our experience with the media, on our image of ourselves, and on our perceptions of what is “right, good and beautiful” in our culture.

QUESTIONS to use with video audiences:

1. Getting started

- ◆ What do you know now that you didn't know before...or what did you know before that you now understand in a different way?
- ◆ What questions about racism does the video raise for you?
- ◆ What did you think was missing?
- ◆ Give one example of how each of the following was discussed in the video: Personal prejudice, Interpersonal racism, Cultural racism/bias, and Institutional racism

2. Reflections of the Culture

Let's look at this film through the lens of race:

- ◆ Who were the experts about the subject matter? Who were the experts about their experience?
- ◆ How many minutes had passed before the topic of racism was introduced? Does this make a difference? What does positioning imply about the importance of a topic?
- ◆ Describe two examples of racism being identified or confronted in the video?
- ◆ If you were going to remake this video, what might you add? What might you change?

3. Racism in the media industry

- ◆ Notice your evening newscasts. Who are chosen as the “content experts” and who are chosen as representatives of the “experiences” of their group. The pattern of choosing whites as the former and people of color as the latter is common in media portrayals of serious issues. If the white group continues to “use” people of color in this way, they are practicing a form of modern racism. If the person of color continues to participate in events in this way, she or he needs to look at whether the behavior is currently functional for the cause of community building, or whether it has become a kind of internalized oppression and needs to be confronted.
- ◆ When you think historically of women of color in advertising, what images come to mind? To whom were these images/ ads directed? Why? Do these images reflect “old-fashioned racism”? (If possible, bring in magazines from the 1940’s through the 1960’s so that students can see the older ads. You might also consider showing something like the video “Ethnic Notions” to give students some background.)
- ◆ When you think of current images of women of color in advertising, what images comes to mind? To whom are these images/ads directed? Why? How might some of these images reflect “modern racism”? (In addition to some magazines such as “Cosmopolitan” or “Seventeen” or “Life”, you might bring in some magazines targeted at various racial/ethnic groups within your audience’s age group, or progressive magazines that show a diversity of images.)

- ◆ Have you seen examples of people of color promoting or participating in advertising in a way that reinforces stereotypes? Why do you think this happens? Can you relate this to internalized oppression or survival behaviors?
- ◆ What are 3 steps we as individuals can take to challenge racism in the media?
- ◆ An excellent essay by Dr. Teresa Mok on Asian-Americans in the media is included on the Cambridge Documentary Films website. She comments,

“Asian American women are forced to struggle with the consequences of both racism and sexism, although we live in a culture that often views racial differences through a monochromatic black-and-white lens. This can often lead to confusing feeling of being “invisible” racially and culturally in this country. Yet, at the same time, Asian Americans are often seen as foreign, exotic, or “different” — suggesting that, indeed, race and culture do matter and are noticed.”

Have students read Mok’s essay. How is the portrayal of Asian Americans, Latinas/os, and Native Americans in the media similar to and different from the portrayal of African Americans? What are the stereotypical images/representations used?

4. Bringing it closer to home

- ◆ What magazines aimed at cultural groups other than white European-American exist in your school or community library? Do these magazines focus on issues of interest to that group? How are the magazines different than similar magazines focused primarily on white audiences?
- ◆ Are there programs or classes in your school or community

that teach media literacy? Is the issue of racism being addressed?

- ◆ Notice the local billboards, advertisements, store promotions, newspaper stories, etc. Who is included? Are their people of color? How are they portrayed? What are the similarities and differences in the representation?

Using the Film with Middle and High School Students

by Linda Mizell

You are now the first image-based generation to come of age....Today the major form of communication is the image. What does that mean to move from print to image?....Let's talk about how this affects you, how this affects the way you think about yourselves, the way you think about your bodies, the way women think about femininity, the way men think about masculinity and the connections between the two.

Gail Dines, *The Strength to Resist: The Media's Impact on Women & Girls*

The following questions and activities are designed to help adolescents think critically about the ways in which they are influenced by the images they see every day. Activities like these have been used by teachers in middle and high school classrooms in a variety of settings: suburban and urban, public and independent schools, and after school programs. Teachers have used the film in English, social studies, health, journalism, media literacy, and other subject areas.

Most of these questions and activities do not need additional resources in order to complete them; however, we have included references to additional materials and resources which are available on the film's website link at:
www.cambridgedocumentaryfilms.org.

Although you can pick one or two activities to accompany the film if time is very limited, most teachers have found that a minimum of three class sessions seems to be most effective in working with this film as a teaching unit.

I. STUDENT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before watching the video, ask students:

- ◆ How do you decide how you should look?
- ◆ Who or what influences your ideas about how you should look?

Record key points of the discussion on the board. As students watch the film, encourage them to note words, phrases, images or concepts (including but not limited to those from the film) that relate to their own experiences or feelings.

After watching the video, ask students:

- ◆ In what ways has the film challenged any of your previous beliefs or ideas? In what ways does it support any of your previous beliefs or ideas?
- ◆ Which media do you think have the most influence on you? In what ways? Which have the least?
- ◆ In what ways can you recognize negative media influences? How did you come to recognize them? In what ways have you resisted them?

- ◆ Jamila, the 13 year old girl in the film, describes the dilemma she faces in sorting through what is truly her and what is the media's influence: (see Section 4, *The Voices of Girls*)

“It is hard to be sure I am being true to myself all the time. I think sometimes, ‘Do I try to look nice because I want to? Or is it because I feel I have to?’ I don’t know how I make the decision about what looking nice is, or whether I do look good or not....”

How do you know whether you are dressing a certain way or acting a certain way because you want to and you are being true to yourself, or whether you are reacting to all of the messages that surround you?

II. STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Prior to starting these, you may wish to start a class collection of media images that can be used by students for these activities. Have students bring in copies of magazines they've recently read, covers from their favorite CDs, etc. You also may wish to review excerpts from the film as part of these activities. Suggested segments are included.

1) Images of Beauty

Segment: Gloria Steinem @ 4:58min.

Before watching:

Ask each student to collect images (from magazines, newspapers, CD covers, internet sites, etc.) of five women who they think best represent their ideal of beauty.

After watching:

Organize the class into pairs. After students have shared their image collections with their partners, ask each of them to address the following questions as their partners take notes:

- ◆ What physical characteristics do the women in these images have in common? (Consider such features as hair color and texture, skin color, height, weight, etc.)
- ◆ Did you consider anything other than physical characteristics when you chose these five images?
- ◆ Do you think your best friend would choose images that are similar to the ones you chose? Why or why not?

Ask each pair to review their notes and discuss whether the film has challenged or supported their analysis. Reassemble the class and engage a discussion of the students' analysis. Encourage them to use specific examples to explain their ideas. Ask students:

- ◆ Where would you look for images if you did this activity again?
- ◆ Were there any general differences that you noticed in the images that boys picked vs. girls?
- ◆ What role do boys play in deciding who/what is beautiful? How are you affected by this?

2) *Self Portraits*

Segment: Gloria Steinem @ 22:51 min.

Ask students to create a self portrait that reflects, as accurately as possible, the way they see themselves. They may make use of drawings, photographs, magazine cutouts, computer generated graphics, or other visual media to create their self portraits.

Next, ask them to add single words or short phrases that describe how they see themselves.

As an alternative, students may use the following suggestions to create a “word portrait.”

TITLE	Your name (first middle, last or nickname) in capital letters
Line 1	Four characteristics that best describe you
Line 2	[Brother, sister, son, daughter, foster child, etc.] of [relative/guardian’s name]
Line 3	Friend of [name]
Line 4	Who loves [list three objects, people or places]
Line 5	Who feels [three items]
Line 6	Who needs [three items]
Line 7	Who fears [three items]
Line 8	Who gives [three items]
Line 9	Who would like to see [three items]
Line 10	[Choose your own descriptor]
Line 11	Repeat the name you used in the title

- ◆ What parts of your self portrait (either your images or words) do you see reflected in the media?
- ◆ Are these images presented as positive or negative?

3) *Men and Women*

Segment: Gail Dines @ 14:55 min.

Before you view, ask each student to find an image (from magazines, newspapers, CD covers, internet sites, etc.) that includes both women and men (or girls and boys).

After viewing, organize the class into small groups. Ask each group to analyze how men and women are portrayed in the images, and to list their observations, specifically noting:

- ◆ Who is placed higher in the shot? Who is lower?
- ◆ Who is in the background? Who is in the foreground?
- ◆ Who is looking at whom or what?
- ◆ How are the men dressed? How are the women dressed?
- ◆ What attitudes are conveyed by their body language?
- ◆ Who appears to be the most powerful? Why?
- ◆ Do the images support the assertions made by the people in the film?

Ask students to comment on the following quote from Jamila, the 13 year old girl in the film (see Section 4, The Voices of Girls):

“Whenever I see an image of a young man hurting a

women or acting tough and “manly,” I feel sad. Not just because women can never be portrayed in charge of themselves like that, but because of what it does to boys my age. Boys grow up thinking this is how they have to be. Not only is it a body image, but a whole aura that they have to show.”

4) *Music Videos*

Segment: Brittany Spears @ 1:22 min.

Ask students to watch six music videos (two by male artists, two by female artists, and two by groups), with the following questions in mind. For each one, they should record the time the video was shown, the network on which it was shown, the name of the artist, and the title of the song.

- ◆ Describe the physical appearance of the women in the videos. What did most or all of these women have in common?
- ◆ What were the women doing? What were the men doing? What did their actions have to do with the lyrics of the song?
- ◆ What are some of the themes than run through the videos?
- ◆ How many of the videos you watched portrayed women in a negative way? What made them negative?
- ◆ How many portrayed women in a positive way? What made them positive?
- ◆ Were the videos by female artists significantly different from those made by male artists? If so, in what ways?

5. *Using Your Body*

Segment: Athletics/Boxing @ 24:02 min.

One of the strategies suggested in the film to resist the media's unrealistic images of beauty is to use your body physically — to get to know your body as something other than a reflection in a mirror or a source of dissatisfaction.

NOTE TO TEACHERS: For some students who viewed this video, there was too much emphasis on athletics to achieve this body knowledge which limited options for people who were not interested in athletics or who were physically challenged.

Have students get together in small groups and brainstorm options for appreciating your body — its strength, power, usefulness — other than athletics. What were some other suggestions made or implied in the video?

Ask students to act out these alternatives for their classmates, using words, music, dance, mime or other forms of physical expression.

Have students read and comment on Deborah Lake Fortson's essay on using the voice -- as in singing or acting -- as an alternative resistance strategy. (The essay is available on the film's website link.) You might want them to write a short reaction and then read it out loud — with lots of expression! — to the class.

6. Getting Real—Images of Real Women

Segments: Gloria Steinem & Photo montage @ 23:00 min. and Catherine Steiner-Adair (photo tree activity) @ 28:48 min.

Ask each student to bring in pictures of two women they admire, look up to, or who have been positive influences in their lives.

Have students design a bulletin board to display these images.

As students place their two pictures on the board, ask them to introduce these women and describe why they admire them.

At the end of the period, ask students to reflect in writing about what it means to focus on real women...

...and/or ask them to reflect on this quote from Briana, a 14 year old girl (see Section 4, *The Voices of Girls*):
“It has helped me so much to have my mother and

Sister as role models to me. They look just like a woman should, and they are beautiful. They are opinionated, assertive and loud, and encourage me to be as well. And I am. These are not the only strong, confident women in my life. I have a whole community of them, and I can't tell you how much they have helped me....(cont. on next page)

Just like the models in the magazines influence young girls, my role models influence me to be who I am — but in a good way. Obviously, I, being 5'7" and over 110 pounds with curly brown hair, a Jewish nose, big hips and big thighs, am not perfect in the society's image. But I am perfect in many other peoples' image, and I am just fine to me....Why can't we just be ourselves?"

Using the Film with College Students and Adults

by Gail Dines, Ph.D.

The following curriculum guide expands the topics presented in the film:

- ↑ **Analysis of Image Based Culture**
- ↑ **Images and Ideology**
- ↑ **Body Image**
- ↑ **Pornography**
- ↑ **Resistance to Media Images**

and allows students to actively take their analysis to deeper levels. College instructors can use any or all of these topics with their classes — particularly in media studies, gender studies, women’s studies and sociology — and additional materials and suggested resources can be found on the film’s web site link at:

www.cambridgedocumentaryfilms.org.

Educators working with adult groups for a single event or within a very limited timeframe may want to select an area of concentration or choose one question or activity from each area. Section 2, “*Questions and Activities for Middle and High School Students*” will also have some material that may be appropriate for use.

I. Analysis of Image Based Culture

Within media studies, there is a growing discussion on the nature and importance of moving from a print-based culture to an image-based culture. The main argument here is that the major

form of communication today is the image rather than print. Media theorists argue that this shift has brought about changes in the way we think, process and decode information.

Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi sees the difference between a print-based culture and an image-based culture as one where images “undermine the power of logos, the slow development of rational understanding and analysis, in favor of rapid and fragmented bits of information; instead of abstract conceptual language, it provides vivid, particularistic images, and instead of intellectuals, it creates celebrities.”¹

Issues to Consider:

- ◆ While many of the images we see are stills, increasingly we are bombarded with moving images from television, film, video and the internet. These images move at the speed of the producer, not the consumer. This takes the power away from consumer to process at his or her own speed. The pace of the images today makes it impossible to critically analyze the messages. We see them but do not have enough time to deconstruct the meaning within the images.
- ◆ Print allows us to go back to the text and analyze it at our own pace. We can put the text down and come back to it. Moving images are here one second and gone the next. Ultimately, they all just collapse together into a confusing, but often disturbing, mush.
- ◆ To produce print, you need literacy, access to writing materials and the printing press. This was always political in that only some people (elite classes) had access to main stream distribution. But print based culture did allow for a range of ideas to be disseminated since the technology needed was relatively inexpensive.

- ◆ To produce the moving image, you need expensive equipment and skills that few have. Producing this type of image media is much more complex and requires sophisticated technology that few can afford.
- ◆ Images are more seductive than any other kind of communication. They draw us in and speak to us in ways that short circuit critical analysis. They have the appearance of always telling the truth because we are seeing it with our eyes.
- ◆ Moving images require less energy than print. We become much more passive when consuming the image since we really do not need to use our imagination. All the work is done for us. (Example: Think about reading a book and then seeing the film. The characters rarely look like they do in our mind's eye. We often are disappointed with the film and can never really go back to our own images that we have constructed from the book.)
- ◆ Images surround us everywhere. The visual landscape has been taken over by corporate produced images designed to sell us products. It is impossible to ignore images. They are on buses, on billboards, at bus stops, in the supermarket, checkout, in stores, on the television, in magazines, and over the Internet. We are now in an image-cluttered environment where the producers are competing for our eyes.
- ◆ The staple of the image-based culture is the sexualized body of young, thin, white women. Whereas print allowed for a diversity of women's bodies, the image culture has narrowed the diversity to an almost single body shape. As women, we constantly compare ourselves to the image of

the “perfect” body. We can never actually meet the standard since it is a constructed image that has little connection to real women’s bodies.

Ask students to:

- ◆ Keep a log of the number of the advertising images they see each day as they go about their normal daily routine. Write down what the image was selling and what clues helped them understand what the image was selling, both overtly and covertly.
- ◆ Watch television to research how often the screen changes from one scene to the next. It is useful to separate the genres so that students can time screen changes for advertisements, drama shows, news, MTV and children’s shows, especially cartoons. Which genre has the most screen changes? What do screen changes do to/for the viewer?
- ◆ Read a book and then watch the movie version. Require them to write a description of the visual aspects of two or three characters as they imagine them from reading the book. After seeing the movie, they can discuss in class how they now see the characters. The next project could be to reverse the process whereby students watch the film first and then read the book. One issue to explore here is to examine which genre was more powerful.
- ◆ Watch an old movie and keep a log of how often the screen changes. Also, explore how the dialogue, the camera techniques and the development of the story are different from present day movies.

II. Images and Ideology

Media theorists in that last decade have tended to adopt a more “cultural studies approach” to understanding the way media images construct reality. Rather than talking simply in terms of short-term “effects”, a more psychologically based concept; the discussion now focuses on the long-term ideological effects of living in an image-based culture that is controlled by corporate interests. This kind of analysis necessarily raises questions about how we construct notions of reality from the media and whose reality is actually being portrayed.

One of the main arguments put forward by cultural studies theorists is that the media only tells the stories of a select group of elites and either distorts or renders invisible the lives of minorities. Larry Gross has called this “Symbolic Annihilation” and argues that those without the money and power to own or control the media do not get to have their voices heard in the market place of ideas. (See Valerie Batts’ “*Looking through the Lens of Race*” included in this study guide.)

Issues to Consider

- ◆ All images are encoded with ideological messages. There is no such thing as an innocent image since it has been carefully constructed to meet a particular standard in order to sell a product.
- ◆ Images rarely, if ever reflect reality. All images are a distorted view of reality since they are highly stylized. They are not a slice of life but a constructed version of reality.
- ◆ Many theorists argue that the version of reality encoded in images is that which serves the interests of the dominant group such as corporations and wealthy, white, heterosexual men.

- ◆ This process has been termed “hegemony” and is defined by Michelle Barrett as “the organization of popular consent to the ideology of the dominant group and for ‘hegemony’ to be secured everyone must accept, at the level of ‘common sense’ knowledge, the view of the dominant class.”

Ask Students to:

- ◆ Watch the evening news on the same channel every day for one week. Who actually gets to speak? What do they speak about? Are they “subject matter experts” or do they have another role? Which groups do these people represent? Observe how often during the week the stories of racial or cultural groups other than white European-Americans are featured.
- ◆ Examine how minority groups are represented, how they are depicted. Are they shown as experts in a field or as examples of people who do not conform to the American dream through choice rather than lack of opportunity?
- ◆ Watch several sit-coms, police dramas and talk shows to see whether minority groups are “symbolically annihilated”.
- ◆ Find examples of alternative media. Discuss in class what makes the text and images challenge the prevailing, mainstream media.
- ◆ Explore how consumerism is promoted as a way of life and as a solution to problems that are created as a result of the unequal distribution of money and power.
- ◆ Design an advertising campaign for a product which students find useless. Their job is to sell the product to the class in a way that makes it appealing. Consider what goes

into a “real” advertising campaign: target audience(s), geographics, profit potential, creating a need for products that may have little use or value, etc.

III. Body Image

Studies show that girls and women are extremely dissatisfied with their bodies, often to the point of hating their bodies, as well as themselves. While this is not a new phenomenon, the images of women have become more and more impossible to live up to. Models are thinner today than they have ever been and there are fewer and fewer alternative images in the media. From movie stars to TV anchorwomen, women in the public eye are expected to conform to a narrow standard of beauty, which is achieved through plastic surgery, excessive dieting, exercising and sophisticated air brushing technology.

Given that real women come in multiple shapes and sizes and skin colors, there is a growing rift between the ideal beauty standard and reality. However, as we become a nation of image consumers, the line between media and reality blurs since we take the media to be a representation of real women.

Issues to Consider

- ◆ How can we, as women, appreciate our own bodies on their own terms when we are “symbolically annihilated” in the media?
- ◆ Why have media images of women become so limited in their standard of beauty? How does this tie in with the massive growth in plastic surgery, the dieting industry, and

the sales of cosmetics?

- ◆ What does it mean to walk around in a body we are at war with? How does this affect the way we feel about ourselves and our rights to demand equality?
- ◆ In what ways do such images impact on our relationship to food? Having a healthy appetite is often seen as a sign of gluttony and lack of self-control. The problem here is that we need food to live and that healthy eating is a sensuous experience that should fill us with pleasure.
- ◆ In many developing countries, women are the last to be fed. They are denied food because of its scarcity and their political standing in society. In this country, where most women do have access to enough food, we are now starving ourselves rather than being purposely starved.
- ◆ What is the relationship between the images of women and eating disorders? Eating disorders in the extreme are anorexia and bulimia, but many women have a difficult relationship to food, one fraught with guilt, shame, and secrecy. This could be seen on a continuum of eating disorders, not as a rare, deviant behavior exhibited by a few anorexics and bulimics.
- ◆ In the past, women with large hips and sturdy thighs were seen as sexual and desirable. Why have we now moved to a culture where these traits are seen as “fat and ugly” and it is only extremely thin women who are viewed as the most desirable?
- ◆ Do standards of beauty differ between various ethnic and racial groups? If so, what are some of those differences?

Ask Students to:

- ◆ Think aloud how they feel about their bodies. Write the responses on the board so they can get a sense of what others think and the commonalities and differences between the feelings. (Or, you could hand out 3X5 index cards and ask each student to write down 5 phrases which indicate how the student feels about her or his body. Then you could write the comments up on the board, putting checkmarks by the duplicate answers.)

- ◆ Bring in advertisements of women in order to explore how these images construct particular notions of femininity.
 - ↑ What do they say about what it means to be feminine in our culture?
 - ↑ What are the dominant ways of representing women in advertisements? Look at facial expressions, body poses, the point of view of the camera and the story encoded in the image.
 - ↑ Develop a list of the themes that run through the ads.
 - ↑ Compare the images of women and men in the ads. Explore how the images differ in terms of the messages of what constitutes the “perfect female” and the “perfect male”.
 - ↑ Examine ads for their racial diversity. Are there any common themes of how women of different ethnic groups are represented?
 - ↑ Compare images in magazines geared to white audiences versus those geared to black audiences. How are femininity and masculinity constructed in the magazines?

- ◆ Examine magazines geared to “larger women” to see if

these models are portrayed differently than those in the regular magazines. And importantly, how large are these women really, who represent the “larger women”?

- ◆ Explore the placements of food ads in the magazines. Are they located near an image of a thin model or any ad or article on diets?
- ◆ Look for alternative images of women. What makes these images challenge the predominant, mainstream images?

IV. Pornography

This topic is extremely controversial in both academic and non-academic circles. Many students will come to class with strong opinions on both sides and the aim should be to explore the different sides of the debate using a range of readings. The brief discussion in the documentary takes the position that much of pornography is a threat to women’s dignity and their right to be safe in their homes, workplaces and communities. From this framework, pornography is seen as a propaganda tool used by patriarchy to legitimize, condone and celebrate violence against women.

The argument is not that pornography causes individual men to rape women, but rather produces and sustains notions of femininity and masculinity that perpetuate violence against women. The pro-pornography position argues that pornography is a form of sexual fantasy that allows for both women and men to explore their sexuality in a sexually repressed society.

To assume that pornography is just fantasy, however, ignores the economic dimensions of the industry. It is also argued that any attempts to limit pornography will result in the

ensorship of sexual expression and freedom. Yet those who do not have money, cannot produce their own forms of sexual expression. It is also useful to ask whose image of sex is being depicted, male or female.

NOTE: This is a difficult subject to teach in class. Some students may be very upset by seeing pornographic images, especially videos. There are usually students in class who have histories of sexual abuse and the topic could trigger memories. Students should not be forced to look at pornography; other options should be discussed in class.

Issues to Consider

Pornography is not just fantasy, rather it is a multi-billion dollar a year industry that is produced in a capitalist, patriarchal system. This means that we need to explore the conditions of its production in terms of who controls the industry and the lives of the women who are used in the industry.

- ◆ Some of the women who work in the industry have written about their experiences. It would be useful to examine the range of experiences these women discuss.
- ◆ There is a growing body of literature on the relationship between the trafficking of poor women and the production of pornography. Since pornography is a multinational industry, it is important to examine how women from developing countries are increasingly being exploited and abused by a global sex industry.
- ◆ Pornography uses specific codes and conventions (the “come get me” look, bondage, women enjoying rape, etc.) to represent the female body. Exploring these codes and conventions facilitates a development of a definition of what pornography actually is.

- ◆ The pornographic codes and conventions filter down to mainstream images of women, especially in advertising. This means that we are often viewing pornographic images without consciously recognizing it. What impact may this have on our acceptance as pornography as mainstream media?
- ◆ Pornography is now a major part of the Internet. To gain a full understanding of pornography, we need to explore the accessibility and nature of Internet pornography.
- ◆ The video pornography industry has grown over the last 10 years to the point that the industry magazine (Adult Video News) has reported that approximately 10,000 new videos were released last year, compared to about 3,000 in 1994. Clearly, the Internet has played a role in the marketing of pornography, but this does not completely explain the growth. What could be the long and short-term effects of this increase?

Ask Students to:

(These suggestions should be discussed with students first. Some may decide they do not want to participate.)

- ◆ Discuss their experience with pornography. When did they first see it and what affect did it have on them?
- ◆ Visit an adult bookstore (if students feel okay about this, do not go alone but go in groups). Take notes on the titles of the movies and the different genres on sale. Observe the social interactions of consumers in the store. Can they discern patterns of interaction that are different to those in

other stores?

- ◆ Explore the themes in pornography.
- ◆ Analyze from whose point of view is the image? Does it take on the position of the female or the male?
- ◆ Examine how the female body is portrayed, what are the facial expressions, does she look like she is enjoying the sex, are there suggestions of violence and coercion?
- ◆ How are men portrayed, are their bodies scrutinized by the camera in the same way as women's bodies?
- ◆ Are there any connections between the participants other than sexual?
- ◆ Consider what the image would look like if women made it? Would sex be portrayed in the same way?
- ◆ Think about what is actually missing from the image/story? Does the images seem like a realistic representation of sex in this culture?
- ◆ Develop ideas on how sexual representation could be constructed differently to show an egalitarian relationship between the participants.
- ◆ Explain why the majority of pornography is still bought by men. While there is a tendency in the media to say that women are now buying pornography in greater numbers, the empirical evidence suggests that this is industry hype.
- ◆ Examine if there are any differences between erotica and pornography? For those who see differences, ask them to find images of erotica and to explore how these images differ from mainstream pornography.
- ◆ Consider what is sexual liberation for women and men? What type of images would provide illustrations of this liberation?

- ◆ Explore what sexual images might look like if penetration was not the main theme.
- ◆ Research how pornography is linked to major corporations who own pornographic web sites. How have pornographers adopted business models to develop the industry? What is the estimated size of the industry? (This material can be found in the business magazines such as Forbes and computer magazines.)

V. Resistance to Media Images

One of the themes developed in cultural studies is the notion of resistance. Media scholars have explored the concept theoretically in order to discern what resistance actually means. Some theorists argue that consumers do not necessarily decode the images in ways that they were encoded. This has been termed “reading against the grain” whereby individuals bring their own histories, world-views, and experiences to a text which results in them making a range of meanings not necessarily intended by the producers.

Other scholars however, have argued that this “reading against the grain” is a pseudo form of resistance, since it does not change the political and economic context of media production. It is important to keep in mind that texts are polysemic (have multiple meanings) while also acknowledging that texts are encoded within a dominant ideological framework.

Given this debate, it is useful to think of resistance in terms of both individual resistance and organized resistance, which calls for structural changes in the ownership and control of media production and distribution and more access to alternative media.

Issues to Consider:

- ◆ How does capitalism as an economic system shape media production and distribution? The last few years has seen the incredible growth in mergers of multinational corporations that have resulted in six major corporations controlling a vast amount of the media worldwide. Thus the question: How can free speech really exist in capitalism?
- ◆ The international nature of these conglomerates has enormous implications for the authentic culture of countries. If the United States is exporting its media across the world, what happens to the culture industries of poorer countries?
- ◆ Corporations have political interests in creating and sustaining ideologies that legitimize consumerism as a way of life. What does this mean for democracy since to flourish, it needs a range of ideas and information?
- ◆ What role can the Internet play in opening up debates and allowing access to ideas that are not found in the corporate controlled media?
- ◆ Groups that are excluded from the mainstream have tended to produce their own media, often in the forms of magazines and newspapers. The aim of this media is often to create a community among the minority group and to provide a forum for discussion of issues that directly impact on the lives of their members.

Ask Students to:

- ◆ Decode the mainstream media to see how hegemonic ideas are encoded in mainstream genres such as news, shows, sit-coms, etc. (You might have students get into small groups and each group analyze one genre.) Examples of hegemonic (dominant) ideas might be that

America is a meritocracy, that women exist to be looked at, that capitalism is the only economic system that works, that African-Americans are violent by nature, that the poor are poor because they are less intelligent and not because we live in a society that has poverty built into the economic system.

- ◆ Examine how texts can be polysemic. One useful method is for all the class to see a movie and discuss how they interpreted the text. Often, there will be a range of interpretations and this highlights how the text is not a closed meaning system.
- ◆ Find examples of progressive and conservative alternative media and examine how they differ from mainstream media owned by corporations. A good example is to compare mainstream teen magazines with “Teen Voices,” a pro-feminist, multicultural magazine aimed at teenage girls. “Ms. Magazine” is another good source. For the conservative magazines, students could use right-wing religious magazines aimed at youth. Another way would be through internet sites.
- ◆ Watch some independent movies see how they differ from mainstream movies in content, narrative structure and ideology.
- ◆ Take a particular event in the news and examine how progressive alternative magazines such as “The Nation,” “Mother Jones” or “Utne Reader” approach the issue. What kind of points do these magazines explore and how do they frame these issues within a progressive paradigm. Compare the coverage of the event to that of a conservative magazine such as “New Republic” or even mainstream media such as “The Wall Street Journal.”
- ◆ Find magazines that are more conservative than main-

stream media and explore the “taken for granted assumptions” in the stories. A good example would be the magazines of the N.R.A. or the right to life movement.

- ◆ Write an article on a topic of interest and submit to a progressive magazine/newspaper or produce a video and submit it to community television in your area.
- ◆ Interview the editors, writers or owners of some alternative magazines to explore how they perceive their role in providing a different way of thinking about events and issues.
- ◆ Search the Web to see how alternative organizations are using this technology to organize their supporters and plan events such as protests, letter writing, boycotts, conferences and local meetings.
- ◆ Choose at least one area where you can take a personal activist stance:
 - ← Write letters to protest images, advertisements or stories that you find offensive;
 - ← Boycott corporations/products that have sexist or racist ads;
 - ← Organize a protest, start a petition or letter writing campaign; or
 - ← Join an organization that promotes group activism around a media issue that concerns you.

The Voices of Girls

essays by Jamila Capitan and Briana Deutch

Briana — October 28, 2000

My name is Briana. I am in the 8th grade at Cambridge Friends School. I am 13 years old (almost 14).

It used to be that when someone saw a young girl who was around 5'3" and over 100 pounds, they'd keep living their lives and wouldn't comment on it. Now, if a girl is the weight she should be, she is criticized by the world. One form of this criticism is teen magazines. They send subliminal (or not so subliminal) messages to young teen girls telling them to live up to the expectations of the society.

The magazines put skinny blonde white girls in their pictures and pretend not to realize that these fake women are what the future women of our world look up to as role models. These "role models" are usually wearing tight, popular, cute clothes that many teen girls either can't fit into or can't afford.

When girls realize this, they think of some way to change it, but the only thing they can change is the "fitting into" part. They set to work, making themselves skinnier, and they usually don't stop. Eating disorders are taking over the world, and teen magazines certainly aren't helping to stop them.

Teen magazines are also making girls want to

be dumb. The models often pose in positions with their finger in their mouth, looking stupid yet innocent. Teen girls already have trouble speaking their minds because they are afraid to look inferior to boys, but the magazines encourage girls to act stupid and just be giggly and shy. When these girls become anorexic or bulimic, they don't have the courage to speak up to themselves and tell themselves to eat, or to keep their food down.

If a model isn't looking stupid, she's looking sexy. Magazines have commercials in them with women lying on the floor, touching their bellies, or something. And they almost always look depressed, but nobody ever notices that because they're too busy staring at the fake breasts that are popping out of the model's shirt (if she's even wearing one.) Of course, girls want to be beautiful, so they go and get implants or surgery and destroy their natural beauty, which can never be recovered; once you have wanted to be different, there is no way you can ever be the same.

If it weren't for our strong women of the world, we teenagers wouldn't survive. It has helped me so much to have my mother and sister as role models to me. They look just like a woman should, and they are beautiful. They are opinionated, assertive, and loud, and encourage me to be as well. And I am. These are not the only strong, confident women in my life. I have a whole community of them, and I can't tell you how much they have helped me. Just like the models in the magazines influence young girls, my role models influence me to be who I am — but in a good way.

In the video, some psychologists said that something happens to girls when they go from being young girls to being young women. They lose some part of them, the loud part and

the opinionated part.

I do agree with this idea, but I think that it happens more to girls who don't have a big community of strong women. I can't say that it didn't happen to me at all, but I know it happened less to me than it did to other girls I know, and I think this is because I have a huge community of strong women who I am very close with. In the video, someone said that they "give themselves up" to be liked by others. I think this is true, not only for girls, but for boys too. I think it happens to girls more and it is also more noticeable in girls because they lose their loudness and their opinions and they give themselves up to be liked by others at the same time.

Some of the women in the film said that the way you react to media images is that you lose sight of how you really look. I agree that this is one of the many ways of reaction to media images. You see all these pictures of skinny blonde white girls and then you see all these people who have been affected by that image and have tried to match themselves to the image, and then you lose sight of what women really look like, and what women should look like.

You start to think that blonde, skinny and white is the norm because that's what everyone looks like in the ads. Instead of trying to make everyone see what's happening, and trying to make everything go back to normal, you make yourself look like everyone else and ignore the lies that are swirling around right in front of your eyes.

I think that when girls say that they don't want to be fat, they are really saying that they don't want to grow into their mature bodies. They don't want to have hips, or a stomach, or big thighs, which is a woman's mature body, and actually, most people are attracted to it, which is what girls want. They don't

want to grow into their mature bodies because they think they won't be attractive, when it's actually the other way around.

Some people might think that the film is too harsh on the cosmetics industry, and that cosmetics are just playful and fun, and don't send messages to girls to fit a certain image. I think that is definitely not true. Cosmetics commercials are always advertising new things that you can put on quickly and just throw in your bag, things that won't wear off easily, so that in situations like when you have a meeting, you don't have to keep re-applying your lipstick or cover-up. You don't put cosmetics on for fun when you're going to a serious meeting. Also, if cosmetics commercials weren't sending a message to young girls to fit a certain image, there wouldn't only be blonde skinny white girls advertising the products. This is the image that society tells us to fit. Why can't we just be ourselves?

Changes need to be made in our society, and I think this video can help. Obviously, I, being 5'7" and over 110 pounds, with brown hair, a Jewish nose, big hips and big thighs, am not perfect in the society's image. But I am perfect in many other peoples' image, and I am just fine to me.

Jamila — October 28, 2000

My name is Jamila. I am thirteen years old and I go to school in Cambridge. I live in Arlington with my Mom and Dad — my brother is away at school. I like dancing, soccer and music, and I spend a lot of time with my friends. I really enjoyed being in the video with my mother. It gave me a chance to talk about some very important issues and learn about the technical process of making a movie.

After seeing the film I found myself wanting to talk about the role of race in media images. There are by far less black women in the media than white. This is very confusing to young black girls because, unlike the white girls they know, no matter how hard black girls try, they can never become white. Black girls can starve themselves, can straighten their hair and even sometimes lighten their skin but, no matter what, they are still black.

Another part of the race issue is the “exotic look”. In magazines, TV and movies, Asian and Latina and Black women are portrayed to have a sort of unearthly charm. Most often, these women do not really look fully Asian, Latina or Black. Boys that I know have talked about models and singers of color being attractive but they are usually referring to the light skinned, straight haired Black models or the Latina Jennifer Lopez look-alikes.

Obviously, the push to be skinny is a major factor in the media today. I personally feel that weightism is just as important as racism, sexism and homophobia. The difference is that people can control their weight. This would not be such a problem because there is nothing wrong with being healthy, but when the images that young girls strive to be like are unhealthy

it is a problem. The control can turn to chaos, or eating disorders.

I think one of the biggest problems about the push to be skinny is that it is meant to be attractive to men. Not only do women get taught by the fashion magazines, but by men as well. It is really only a few men who choose these standards, not normal men we see on the street. Women are constantly told, get smaller, and men are constantly told that woman should get smaller. They lose sight of what real women's mature bodies look like and think that these skinny super models are perfect and everyone else is fat.

As teenagers in our world, we want to be cool, we want to have fun and we want to have friends. All the time, everywhere we go, someone is trying to tell us how to do this: "Wear these clothes, listen to this music, be like this." Media screams these things at us and even if we try not to, we have to hear.

These images, about how to dress and how to act, really limit us. If I do choose to buy these clothes and listen to this music, I am limited in my choices of my appearance and what music I listen to. I am nothing but these clothes and this music. It puts me in a clique of people who dress like me, and because of my "category" I am from a completely different planet then, for instance, a close friend who chooses to dress a different way.

Much of today's media is targeted to young people. It get us in their trap and makes us fall in love with it. We don't usually notice how much media images make us hate ourselves. It is not fair for us, as the main consumers, to be given such a narrow perspective of how life for young people is and should be. We accept this version which hurts us and we don't even notice it is doing us harm. There needs to be a revolu-

tion!

Whenever I see an image of a young man hurting a woman or acting tough and “manly,” I feel sad. Not just because women can never be portrayed in charge of themselves like that, but because of what it does to boys my age. Boys grow up thinking this is how they have to be. Not only is it a body image but a whole aura that they have to show.

Black men watch these stereotypes of other black men and think that is how they should look and dress. I personally think that if someone wants to wear baggy jeans, they should be allowed to without being looked at suspiciously, but since this is not the case, young black men need to see positive role models that are not always dressed a certain way. Women need to see men who are different so that men do not feel so concerned about being “manly” enough.

I think that experimenting with clothing and make-up can be a lot of fun for young girls. I love nail polish and make up because I enjoy seeing myself in new ways. I certainly don't feel as though I need these things to be who I am, or to be beautiful, but I enjoy the decision. I don't think there is any reason why young people should not be allowed to have make up, just so long as they know they don't need it.

The girls we see on television are always heavily made up and, if we see them get out of bed in the morning the first thing they do is put on more. Girls think that is beauty, that is how I must be, so I need make up. I certainly go through never leave the house without lip gloss fazes, but when I stop and really ask myself if I want to wear lip gloss for me, or because of the ad I saw on TV some times I put it down and sometimes I don't.

It is hard to be sure I am being true to myself all the time. I think sometimes, do I try to look nice because I want to? Or is it because I feel I have to? I don't know how I make the decision about what looking nice is, or whether I do look good or not, but I usually am happy with myself. It is important for girls to explore options, there is more than one way to be.

I think that the strong women in my life have played a very important role in keeping me healthy and confident about myself. Stories of my grandmothers, my mother and my many Aunties — all of these women who are not fashion models, but role models — have shaped my life. I think for a girl to grow up with strong assertive women around her is a wonderful gift. For some young girls it ends up being the gift of a voice in teen years. I love all the strong women in my life for being themselves and loving themselves, and I also am inspired by remembering all the struggles they went through to get where they are now.

Additional Essays and Curriculum

Working with Girls 10-12

by Cheryl Hirshman

(Cheryl Hirshman is an artist, founder and former director of the New England Children's Film Festival and a media literacy teacher in the Lincoln, MA school system)

I would like to share some of my experiences using this video with younger girls in the 10-12 age group. I first want to present some of my ideas about media and children that I have developed after working over 15 years in this field.

Background

As parents and educators we accept the arduous task of helping our children navigate the hills and valleys of childhood, while they strive to become adults. Along the way we attempt to provide them with experiences that they can use to build strong values and find purpose and meaning in their lives.

The challenge is made harder by media imagery and rampant commercialism that rely on and support social stereotypes. No longer are parents, teachers, community and churches alone in providing the fuel for a child's life journey. Now, more than ever, we find ourselves co-parenting with disturbing media messages that predominate our society.

Gender conditioning begins from the moment a child is born. Being male or female pre-determines how society will view and teach them about the meaning of their role in the community. Even before the ink is dry on the birth certificate, marketers have begun to target the newborn with "free" samples and coupons such as his or hers disposable diapers. Male children are most often welcomed into this world with paraphernalia decorated with images that symbolize masculinity: footballs, baseballs, cars, trucks and boats; while female children are given frilly, pastel colored items adorned with flowers and hearts.

The mood is set. Females receive the message that they are supposed to be nurturing, passive, cooperative and emotional, while males are defined as independent, aggressive, assertive, and ambitious. By the time children reach puberty they have been subjected to intense marketing campaigns, woven with themes of racism, sexism, ageism and violence.

According to recent studies, children spend an average of 1,456 hours watching TV in one year, while viewing at least 20,000 commercials during that time. These statistics do not include the number of programs cartoons -- sitcoms and made-for-TV movies -- increasingly using product placement in the production. In addition, over the last few years we have seen a greater number of marketing campaigns directed at children via printed materia -- magazines, newspaper ads, billboards, posters and web sites -- more than ever before. Companies that are not only selling products, but also image and lifestyle are pursuing younger and younger children.

In response to this commercial blitz, we must provide

children with the tools to become media literate citizens; so that they may fully understand the impact that message laden commercialism has on their well-being.

Beyond Killing Us Softly: The Strength to Resist

Though “Beyond Killing Us Softly: The Strength to Resist,” was initially intended as an educational video for high school and college age students, I was curious to see how the documentary would translate to younger girls between the age of 10-12. Adolescents in this age group are just on the cusp of discovering their place as women in our culture. They are perhaps the most vulnerable when it comes to media messages and gender stereotyping. After discussion with a number of parents and girl-scout troop leaders, I was given permission to screen the video with a group of girl-scouts. They were all suburban, white, middle-class children. There were 13 girls and four adults participating.

Pre-Screening Discussion

1) The children were told that they were going to be watching a video about images of women in advertising. They were asked if they knew what advertising was. We then discussed what is meant by:

- ◆ The promotion of products, goods and services
- ◆ The promotion of ideas
- ◆ The promotion of values

2) They were asked to make a list of where advertisements are found.

3) They were asked what was meant by *brand names* and

name recognition. I used the example of my name and what images my name conjured up for them—mother of one of the scouts, teacher, filmmaker, artist, etc.—then compared that to images that are conjured up when thinking about Nike or other brand names. We then talked about product symbols and logos.

4) They were asked to look at their own clothing and belongings and to make a list of the logos they were advertising. We discussed the idea of being walking billboards and advertising company logos.

5) They were asked if they identified with the company logos of the items they were wearing.

6) They were asked whether they thought they deserved to get paid for advertising the company.

7) We then discussed advertising concepts, defining:

- ◆ The product
- ◆ The package
- ◆ The pitch
- ◆ The place an ad appears (magazine, TV, billboard)
- ◆ The audience the product is directed to

Activity

1) Each child was given a piece of paper about the size of a standard magazine cover.

2) They were asked to design the cover of a magazine utilizing the following scenario:

“You have just been voted Ms. Teen USA. A number of magazines have approached you to appear on their cover. Choosing one of the following magazines, design the cover layout. Decide how you should look, be posed and what caption should be used to describe you. Also, include other graphics and picture inserts.” Choose one magazine cover:

- ◆ Seventeen
- ◆ Teen People
- ◆ World Soccer
- ◆ American Girl
- ◆ Time Junior

3) When they completed the drawings we hung them up and discussed each of them.

4) We then looked at real magazines.

5) We discussed advertising techniques:

- ◆ Posture of figure
- ◆ Point-of-view of photo
- ◆ Position of model in frame
- ◆ What props are used

Vocabulary Words

Media Literacy

Stereotypes

Anorexia

Bulimia

Sex Trafficking

Culture

Cultural Norms

Breast Augmentation

Screen Video

I recommend that the facilitator stop the video from time to time to discuss some of the issues posed in the film, particularly after the statements by Gail Dines. A discussion will also aid in helping children to understand some of the vocabulary and visual images presented.

Topics for Further Discussion

These topics sprung up during the screening of the video. Most of the students participating did not know anything about them. I believe that studying a brief history of the women's movement will greatly benefit young girls and allow them to better understand the content of the video.

History of the Women's Movement.

Eating Disorders

Body Image

Post-Screening Discussion

- 1) Using the "Three R's of Media Critique: REVIEW, REACT, RESPOND," conduct a post-screening discussion.
- 2) REVIEW the video and discuss some of the points that the students found interesting.
- 3) REACT to the information, by discussing how it felt to see the visuals illustrating the topic and the messages those visuals symbolize.
- 4) Discuss the various things that make a person who they are:
 - ◆ Cultural background (Ethnicity, Race, Religion, Class)
 - ◆ Family
 - ◆ Community
 - ◆ Peer group
 - ◆ Education

- ◆ Environment/where you live
- ◆ Misc. experiences

- 5) Have a discussion about how others see us. Ask students if they were to walk in a room where they didn't know anybody, what criteria would they use in order to choose whom to sit next to. Discuss what information we use in judging someone.
- 6) Discuss peer pressure.
- 7) The students talked about how they could RESPOND or take action against the companies that promote negative, violent and sexist images of women. We discussed letter writing campaigns, boycotts and teach-ins.

Post Screening Activity

A. Cultural Identity Tree

- 1) The scouts were asked to draw a tree with roots, trunk and leaves.
- 2) We discussed that the leaves would represent the outside or appearance of a person or group as seen through clothing, body language and verbal language. We further discussed that this is often how we first begin to judge someone.
- 3) We talked about the symbolism of the trunk, that it would represent a person or groups traditions and customs, giving us yet another layer of understanding about that person or group.
- 4) We discussed that the roots would represent the philosophy, laws and beliefs of a person or group and that it is in this layer that we begin to really understand where a person or group is coming from, why they have the tradition and customs that they have and why they might dress or behave in a certain manner.
- 5) They were asked to fill in the tree with information about themselves.

B. Readers Theatre

1) Using a provocative ad from a fashion magazine the students were asked to study the picture and write a brief story about the model, answering the following questions:

- ◆ What is the model's name, and age?
- ◆ Where does she come from?
- ◆ What does she do?
- ◆ Why is she in the place in the photo?
- ◆ What recently happened to her?
- ◆ Is she waiting for someone?
- ◆ Has she been left alone?

2) After the girls completed their descriptions, they were placed in groups of three and were asked to share what they wrote with each other.

3) They were told that they were going to produce a play for "Readers Theatre". I read them a definition written by theater educator, Marianne Adams, which says, "Readers Theatre is a form of oral interpretation, which uses a variety of written forms, novels, plays, poetry, etc. Two or more actors stand or sit, usually with scripts, and present the text expressively, using gesture and movement. The focus is on the words and making them come to life in the listeners' mind. The actors' focus is out towards the audience. The simplicity of the format emphasizes gestures, nuance in language, and the placement of actors as important elements of the performance."

4) The students were asked to choose elements from each of the three writings in their small group and combine them into one story, creating a script.

5) They were told that they would decide how their joint script would be performed, what words or phrases they wanted to emphasize, what stage directions they wanted and what ges-

tures they wanted to use.

6) After rehearsing a few times, each group performed their piece.

7) The performance was videotaped in order to discuss and critique the content and execution of the pieces.

8) After completion of the performances, we watched the tape and discussed:

- ◆ What worked well?
- ◆ How something might have been more clearly presented.
- ◆ Was the process helpful in creating an alternative meaning to the message the ad provoked? Did they create their own message?
- ◆ What did it feel like to give the ad model a voice?
- ◆ If you could, what would you tell the model, or the company?

Comments

The screening and the pre and post activities took three 2-hour sessions. The girls could have continued with this topic for many more sessions. I do think that having pre-screening discussions about the topic with this age group is important. It prepares them for the information to follow. I would however, caution facilitators to carefully assess the readiness of the girls in their group before showing the video. Though the subject matter is vital material for all young people to consider, the language of the piece is directed at an adult level and may lose children under the age of 10.

At first, like many of the other adults participating in the screening, I was skeptical that the girls would understand the

information in the video. Some of the parents thought that the images would actually frighten the children or stimulate them to want to mimic some of the postures and attitudes portrayed in the ads. We were pleasantly surprised by the in-depth discussion the girls initiated after the screening. Their comments were insightful, intelligent and mature. They discussed color imagery in children's ads and commercials and were able to clearly articulate their feelings about the images. They were very interested in the use of light skinned black women in the ads and the absence of other women of color. They summarized the messages presented in the ads as telling women to be, "Perfect, pretty, thin and vulnerable." They talked about their own comfort levels, what they liked to wear and why.

John Dewey, the father of progressive education, believed that successful education should, "help children learn to see what they look at, hear what they listen to, and feel what they touch." Following those sentiments, if we provide opportunities for young people to become media literate—critical viewers of media—then we are giving them a most useful tool to navigate through life.

Additional Essays and Curriculum

SPEAK!

*by Deborah Lake Fortson, actor/playwright/
director, Tempest Productions, Inc.*

How to preserve girls' resilience and energy, their truth-telling, passionate nine, ten, eleven year old voices? To speak with passion in front of people enlarges who a girl is. She takes up more space: her vibrations penetrate the world around her like waves coming off a stone thrown into water. When the listeners are appreciative, they send back waves of vibration and the speaker feels affirmed and psychically large.

Speaking thoughts and feelings aloud to a group can feel great for all of us, parents and children. Physical activity gives most of us a sense of well being and a strong sense of self. So we tell young people to do sports. What if a girl doesn't like sports? Using her voice can be just as satisfying. Speaking and singing are physical activities as well as expressive activities.

Voice training is a physical training just like swimming or running. It increases oxygen supply and builds new muscles. It makes you feel taller, more three-dimensional and more powerful. Where can a young person build and exercise a full voice?

A theme of this film and of the work of Carol Gilligan and her associates Normi Noel, Annie Rogers and others, is to give girls safe environ-

ments in which to exercise their voices and practice doing it.

1. Debating, Drama and Voice Training.

Debating is terrific as a forum where girls and boys can strut their stuff both intellectually and physically, speaking for an audience and being physically on stage.

Putting on a play is a time-honored confidence builder. Creating plays which young people write themselves is an even bigger booster and builder of clear expression.

Training the voice to speak is a physical activity as much as an expressive one. Perhaps schools could have voice training for their acting companies and their debating teams the way they have fitness training for their football teams! Why shouldn't the kids who want to think or speak poetry on their feet have the physical training support that the athletic teams have?

2. Voice, Feeling and Action.

But of course, voice is not only physical. It connects thought and feeling to an action with the body, to a vibration made with the body in space. As Carol Gilligan has said, voice is "a powerful psychological instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds."

After a session with a voice trainer, expanding breathing capacity, flexing muscles, a young person can feel more able to speak loudly and effectively, and will tend to say more what she feels, be more sure of her convictions. Sure enough to say them loudly and unexpectedly to a group of people. It is important that training be connected to opportunities for expression. Expression can lead to action on the issues being felt and spoken about!

3. Rehearsal, Role-Playing for Life, with Tempest Productions.

An important preparation for speaking is rehearsing. Speaking up in real life a girl can run a greater risk than she does speaking in the environment of a debate or a play. This also requires rehearsal and strategizing as well.

Doing structured role-playing around a theme can help young people get ideas for strategies around situations where usually they have a difficult time breaking their silence.

The theme of silence is a major element in EAT! , a play presented by Tempest Productions, Inc. on the history of a girl and an eating disorder. There are moments in the story when the heroine thinks about speaking up but doesn't. As she gets addicted to her eating problem, she becomes more and more isolated, refusing to speak about it. An important part of her recovery is learning to say what she feels and thinks.

In a workshop Tempest actors conduct after performing EAT! for high school and college audiences, the actors give audience members the opportunity to rewrite scenes to have the heroine speak up. The audience chooses scenes which they would like to change, and the actors replay the scene for them. Then a member of the audience replaces the actor in the scene and speaks new lines, trying to strategize against the oppressive force that originally keeps the heroine silent. They may instead of acting it themselves, feed the actress the lines to say as she re-plays the scene.

This work is based on Forum theater as developed by Augusto Boal.

The experience of speaking out in a role with their own thoughts and feelings is very empowering and exciting for

students. The experience for the audience of watching their peer speak up, hearing the part of the silent girl reborn as the part of a girl who talks back and stands up for herself -- is very exciting for everyone, including faculty and counselors. This exercise also points up how difficult it is to develop strategies to speak up and how alert we have to be for opportunities to do so. And it gives young people a chance to practice strategy in a safe environment.

4. What about singing?

There are numerous chorus opportunities in the lives of students. What about other types of adventurous use of the voice? Singing contests? Song-writing contests? Contests where kids do rap.

Parents need to press for more kinds of singing in schools and find out opportunities for singing outside school. What about singing at home?

5. Can't we have effective expressive Voices in all the arts in our Schools?

In fact, all the programs in arts of all kinds- painting, ceramics, sculpture, drawing, as well as dance, theater, and music, and any trade such as electrical work, automobile repair, carpentry, where you learn a skill with your hands, all these activities build confidence and expressiveness and help young people assert their place in the world.

These are also the activities which are increasingly cut from our public school programs. If parents can make school boards realize how important these activities are to helping the adolescent feel whole and empowered, we can restore some of the capacity for education as a "leading out" of the whole person which many schools have had in previous generations. Private schools know the importance of these so-called "extra" subjects, and often spend lavish amounts of money on

drama, film, sculpture, art, music, because they know how important these activities are in the training of future leaders who are confident and clear in their thought and expression, whatever field they enter.

Let's begin with the adults speaking up in public so our young people can follow suit to enlarge their physical expression, their voices, their lives!

Eds. Note: You can contact Tempest Productions for a performance of Deborah Fortson's play EAT at (617) 731-9697.

Additional Essays and Curriculum

Media Images and Their Effects on Asian American Women

*Teresa Mok, Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist
Counseling Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-
Champaign*

The Strength to Resist: The Media's Impact on Women & Girls does a nice job explicating the powerful connections that media images have on our perceptions of ourselves and others. The documentary focuses primarily on the deleterious effects the media can (and often does) have on women, especially in relation to body image and self-esteem. The video also pays attention to cultural and racial messages about beauty and attractiveness, in addition to gender-based messages about appearance.

This is helpful because in many venues, be they social science articles or popular press publications, classifications of gender and race are often treated as dichotomous, independent entities – despite the fact that they are inseparable within individuals. While the documentary deals generally with the impact of media images on women and girls, the specific purpose of this essay is to delineate how issues brought up in the film might particularly apply to Asian American women.

This essay will deal with several related areas.

First, some of the mental health research focusing on how Asian American women perceive themselves in terms of physical attractiveness will be presented. Then, specific stereotypes of Asian American women will be discussed. These stereotypes and images will be shown for their contributions both to self-perceptions by Asian American women and perceptions of Asian American women by others. The connections between media images of Asian American women and their profound impact on this group of women will be explored.

Invisible or Exotic

Asian American women are forced to struggle with the consequences of both racism and sexism; although we live in a culture that often views racial differences through a monochromatic black-and-white lens. This can often lead to confusing feelings of being “invisible” racially and culturally in this country. Yet, at the same time, Asian Americans are often seen as foreign, exotic, or “different,” suggesting that, indeed, race and culture do matter and are noticed.

In a country in which supermodel Cindy Crawford is considered “exotic,” Asian American women may feel that the standard of beauty has little room for them. Indeed, recognizing and trying to integrate these differing, seemingly dichotomous messages can be a painful struggle leading to internal conflict and confusion. This conflict can lead to questioning at a fundamental level about self-definition, self-worth, and identity.

The “Model Minority”

One of the most prevalent stereotypes of Asian Americans in general is that of a “model minority,” denoting hard workers, good students, and a group that has little in the way of social problems that affect other minorities. Although there is

recognition that this, as with most stereotypes, is limiting, inaccurate, and incapable of capturing the heterogeneity of this diverse Asian American population, the stereotype and its associated characteristics persist today. Not often discussed is one of the corollary assumptions suggested by this stereotype: that Asian Americans might have relatively positive self-concepts and healthy self-perceptions.

Although this may be true in a limited way for some Asian Americans with respect to academic success, psychological research clearly has demonstrated that Asian Americans tend to have poor body image, poor physical self-esteem, and negative self-concept as it relates to physical attractiveness. And although this affects both Asian American men and Asian American women, the focus of this essay will be the ways in which Asian American women are deleteriously affected by media images and stereotyped portrayals.

Negative Self-Image

Although a popular American saying claims that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” the incredibly narrow band of what constitutes beauty should give anyone pause to challenge that claim. Asian American women often struggle with feeling that they do not look “all-American,” and that the definition of being “all American” racially excludes them. Psychological research on Asian Americans and physical attractiveness has yielded two primary findings.

First, Asian Americans do not believe that they are physically as attractive as Whites. Secondly, Asian Americans often impart more positive qualities to Whites than to their own racial group. These conclusions should be horrifying and shocking to us as a multicultural and diverse society. They also should silence doubts that race is a potent factor in perceptions of

attractiveness and that these messages are internalized to the detriment of individuals and our communities.

Changing Physical Characteristics

In terms of specific characteristics that Asian American women cite as the most disliked on their own bodies are the physical features that are tied to race. In other words, the features Asian American women have described as most wishing they could change were those features that tended to differentiate them from Whites.

For example, skin color, as it is for other communities of color, also is a significant determinant of beauty in the Asian American community. Lighter skin is often valued and prized more than darker skin. Eye shape and size is also scrutinized and evaluated, with some Asian American women literally using Scotch tape to create an epicanthic fold on their eyes.

Nose shape and height, cheek shape, and breast size are other characteristics that are often criticized by Asian American women about their own bodies. Often Whites are seen as the “standard” for what constitutes beauty and there is much psychological distress and energy invested in how one can possibly achieve looking as White as possible. Many Asian American women tell stories about pinching their noses so as to attempt to achieve a “less flat” appearance. Others even tell painful stories of attempting to dye their hair blonde or of wearing colored contact lenses to change their appearance. Often some of these women will talk clearly about how they engaged in such behaviors to attempt to mask their own racial phenotype.

Sadly, Asian Americans are the most likely ethnic minority group to pursue cosmetic surgery. Many of the changes sought to be altered surgically attend to the very

features described above – and these are changes that are inextricably tied to race. The media is seen as a potent force in bombarding Asian American women with White standards of beauty as a driving factor in seeking plastic surgery. There are even plastic surgeons who specifically target Asian Americans for their procedures in their advertisements. Some claim to be “Asian eye specialists,” while others suggest cheek reduction surgery for Asians who, by virtue of their ethnic background, possess “large amounts of cheek fat.”

We should be outraged by claims like this that so clearly delineate that race has a definite impact on the definition of beauty. Therefore, when assessing or discussing standards of beauty, mental health researchers and media scholars need to make sure their definitions and investigations cover the broad spectrum of issues beyond weight that deal with body image. And in our daily lives, we need to be vigilant of who is being portrayed – and who is not being portrayed – in the media.

Representation Lacking

Indeed, part of what makes the media images of Asian Americans so potent is that the images that do exist are so extremely limited in scope and so often defined by a trite stereotype. Asian American women are often only seen in a handful of roles and parts: kung fu expert (or kung fu expert’s daughter), news anchor, or mail-order bride. Take a moment and consider our current national demographics (of which Asian Americans constitute approximately three to four percent) and racial makeup and diversity within various localities in the U.S.

Then consider some of the popular television shows and advertisements that run currently – many of which are set in a variety of large, urban cities, where there is known to be sizable populations of Asian Americans. Yet Asian Americans

are rarely on-screen presences; they are generally neglected or if they are seen at all they are merely “background color” to the actions of Whites. Thus, the relative invisibility of Asian Americans in the media heightens the pressure on any of the few images that do exist.

Dragon Lady or Selfless Woman

In terms of gender- and race-specific stereotypes, Asian American women are often seen in one of two dichotomous images. One of these stereotypes is embodied by an Asian American female character on television currently. Playing a lawyer on a show about lawyers and their professional and personal lives, this woman has been said to represent a “Dragon Lady.” The Dragon Lady is a particular image that intertwines race and gender into a stereotype that connotes an innate mysteriousness and exotic eroticism.

The Dragon Lady is seen as being able to charm and seduce men (often White men), yet is deadly in her intentions. This character in the television show is known for growling at her co-workers and has ensnared her boss with sexual tricks she performs with her long, flowing black hair. Perhaps, one might argue, this Asian American character is simply unusual, as many of the other characters on this particular show are. However, there are so few Asian American women portrayed in the media that this image certainly carries more power than if it were merely a portrayal that Asian American women could weigh and evaluate against many other images. Additionally, this portrayal is a stereotype, and one that is specific to Asian and Asian American women.

The other stereotype of Asian American women is one in which they are portrayed as submissive, delicate, and meek, always putting other’s (especially men’s) needs before their own. A classic example of this stereotype is the main Asian female character in the Broadway musical, Miss Saigon. (As a

side note, there is often a lack of separation on the part of the public as to the difference between Asians and Asian Americans. This lack of distinction is erroneous but as a result, there is often a blending of images and perceptions, such that Asian Americans are seen as Asian.)

This female character falls in love with a White man, bears his child, and ultimately kills herself so that he and his new White wife can take the child and raise it as their own. Such a “selfless act” should be seen for what it really is: integrally tied to race and gender. After all, a role reversal with a White woman and an Asian man would be seen as ludicrous. Yet that such an image of behavior for Asian women is seen as noble, attractive, or worse yet, perhaps genetically innate is both disgusting and racist.

The connection between submissive, powerless Asian women and sex was mentioned in the documentary by references to the sex trafficking of Asian women. Asian American women are often seen in this manner and the sickening link from submissiveness to bondage and torture was horrifyingly illustrated in the pornographic image of an Asian woman who was shown lynched and hanging from a tree.

Psychological research has shown that when Asian women are portrayed in pornographic material, they are often shown in situations where they are being tortured or abused. Research has demonstrated that the pornography with women of color often varies the content dependent upon race. Thus, Asian women are depicted in wartime scenarios, as prostitutes or sex slaves, often as helpless and passive.

In conclusion, this documentary video calls for all of us to be revolutionary as we challenge media images around us. It calls for us to be critical consumers of what we take in. In addition, broadening our attention to always include cultural

messages or implication within media images and portrayals is necessary if we strive to be inclusive and representative of the diversity that truly surrounds us everyday.

Additional Essays and Curriculum

Marketing "Woman" to Women Online

By Noy Thrupkaew

I just couldn't do it. I was shuddering at the thought of becoming a member of women.com, one of a rapidly proliferating group of "women's websites," for the purposes of research for this piece. After spending just a few days surfing women.com and iVillage.com, the only publicly traded websites "made by and for women," I was already worried that I would turn into the endlessly dieting, baby-making, big-rock-wearing, tamale-pie-baking, husband-pampering creature that is "Woman" on many of the mainstream women's websites.

These websites don't sell themselves that way, of course. They attract women web surfers with perks like surveys, online sex therapists, tax advisers, and chats with famous folks. It's sort of fun in a gross and bloated way, like screeching over Angelina and Billy Bob while eating buckets of chocolate chip cookie dough with your girlfriends. But after a while, it's hard to take. Both women.com and iVillage.com assault the web surfer with immense amounts of feminized goo, from "Pecan Pie: The Southern Specialty," to the helpful "Take some time to make yourself look good!" in an advice column on Making the Transition From Housewife to Employee. It was a little difficult to get to the articles themselves, though, because my attention kept getting diverted by the

shrieking ads telling me to subscribe to Cosmo, buy cute shoes, and purchase "solutions for easy living."

I had already exposed myself to this radioactive blast of "marketing for women," so why not go the extra step and become a member? After all, members of women.com and iVillage.com get a range of goodies from free email accounts and live chat to pregnancy calendars, access to online women's mags, and a "wedding builder." But becoming a member would mean that the websites could declare open season on my email inbox, sending chirpy newsletters, special offers, and heavy-breathing ads for "women's stuff."

My mailbox is already bursting with DO YOU LIKE HOT SEX?, LOSE 2-14 INCHES IN ONE HOUR!, ACNE CURE & PENNY STOCK PICK!, MAKE \$\$\$\$ FOR NO WORK!, so the thought of adding this new twist to what the cybergods already see fit to send me would be too much. "Oh, not only is this person horny, chunky, zitty, and lazy, but she's a woman! She must be white, straight, and married, with two kids, a dog, and an SUV! She must like to shop! And for woman things! Things for her family! Because women are relational."

This is actually pretty much the logic behind women's websites. Studies like those published in the past two years by Jupiter Communications, the "worldwide authority on internet commerce," fanned the flames with their predictions that women will be spending \$53 billion per year on internet purchases by 2003. Venture capitalists and internet developers jumped on board, launching "women's websites" as part of a strategy to corner a previously ignored market.

Relationship Marketing

These folks turned to a bit of corporate philosophy called "Relationship Marketing" to peddle their consumer portals. A

prime example is this inspirational nugget from Faith Popcorn, trend guru and corporate consultant, who wrote a book on marketing to women entitled *EVEolution*: "Marketing to women requires not just learning, but unlearning. Marketers will need to create a rich series of connections and bonds rather than episodic consumer collisions."

MLM Talk Online, a resource website for network marketing professionals, exhorted internet developers to cater to women's "advanced social and people skills. The current rage of 'Relationship Marketing' just puts a new label on the tools that women have always used to build their business." Got that?

It seems that women are a whole different species from men--we are relational and love community. This is not an unfamiliar concept to those who have indulged in John Gray's *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, or Deborah Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand* to explain away all the difficulties between men and women. (Carol Gilligan may have started it with *In a Different Voice*, but she was genuinely on to something, and I don't think she had Gray's intergalactic sexism in mind when she wrote her book.)

I'm sure some differences between the genders do exist, but as Francine Prose wrote in "A Wasteland of One's Own," her scathing *New York Times Magazine* essay on women's culture and websites, there are probably not as many "as there would be if this were a society in which men and women could casually decide which gender wants to be president this term, and which one wants to take care of the kids and Great-Grandma. Humans are adaptive creatures, and the people who are responsible for the family tend to get interested in family relationships."

But internet developers aren't so radical, so relationship marketing--"build a relationship with women so they buy things for their relationships"--and "women's culture" is what we get. They try to trick us with solicitous advice, sympathetic polls ("The hardest part about dieting and weight loss is a. hunger, b. unappetizing food choices, c. eating out, d. getting off the couch, e. all of the above"), helpful suggestions and tips, and wise experts to guide us through our harried lives as wives and mothers. (And no, there's no room for divorced, unmarried, single parent, young, old, disabled, queer, darker than lily, or poorer than middle here. We are Woman. Resistance is futile.)

But lurking behind all of the handholding are the twin evils of relationship marketing and the co-option of the noble idea of women's space. It's much like being invited to dinner at your best friend's house, only to have her shake you down for all you're worth once you're behind closed doors.

There's something even more insidious behind all the relational talk, however. At Oxygen Media, home to Oprah Winfrey's magazine, cable-TV network, and website, chair-woman Geraldine Laybourne says women "are pushed and pressured in such amazing ways that they deserve to have a place where they can take a deep breath."

Of course women need their blissful solitude. We rarely get any help with or credit and financial compensation for the work of care and mothering--work that has been demeaned through the centuries as "women's work in the home." Add to that the work outside the home that many women do and what do you get? That old Calgon-take-me-away commercial, which was all about the incredible wear and tear of an "average" woman's life. But does this mean that that woman should never

get up to fight the larger forces that sent her scuttling to her bathtub in the first place?

Cleaner Homes, Smurfier Lives? Or Something More? If one chooses to buy into this, one can gain a little happiness, I suppose. We can buy the products to make our houses cleaner and more efficient, our families happier, our work lives smoother, our home lives smurfier--ignoring the fact that all this buying will create a cycle of more exhausting work that necessitates another deep breath at the end of it. We can indulge in what I'll call "My Home-ism"--the belief that if our homes are spotless and full of gadgetry, our work is going well, and our families are perfect, our work as human beings is done. We can also tone, trim, dewrinkle-ize ourselves until we're perfect. Our worlds can get smaller and smaller, so we never have to think about all those bad things out there--imbalances of power, sexism, racism, homophobia, inequity, and economics -- and we can escape in our pinker than pink cyberworld.

But I'm not sure that will happen, despite all the doom and gloom I felt after examining the marketing strategies behind the sites. Both iVillage.com and women.com have seen their stocks plummet after an initial stratospheric take-off, even though nearly four million women visit their sites each month. It turns out that not enough of the web surfers actually click on the ad banners that can bring the sites some revenue. This is no surprise to some shoppers, especially the ones who like to get all up in a potential purchase, try it on, frown, fuss, fidget, take it off, leave, and come back and try it on again before buying it and returning it the next day.

But more than that, women are actually building their own communities, real communities--with each other, and not with sponsoring corporations. Take Peg Gray of Maine, for ex-

ample. As a breast cancer survivor, she felt alone because support groups were an hour's drive away, according to the Boston Globe. She turned to anonymous iVillage message boards and chat groups. "I lurked for a while, reading things that the ladies were saying to each other, and finally mustered enough courage to post something myself," she said. "The depth of compassion and empathy and the love and concern for others is unequalled. . . . It felt like family from the beginning." She now spends two hours a day on the website as a volunteer discussion leader.

Even the fact that some of the websites might draw women online can be a great thing. Oprah's Oxygen Media group was especially proactive about getting women online, creating a TV series, "Oprah Goes Online," whereby Her Oprah-ness and best friend Gayle King go online in twelve sessions. "From email to chats to search engines to home pages, the two women will explore their options and experience firsthand how the Web will change the way women look at money, shopping, education, community, technology and themselves."

Although the priorities of the series are a little messed up -- money and shopping come first, of course -- who's to say that women won't feel they can handle the internet more comfortably? That we won't level that loudly lamented but not-acted-upon gender gap in technology even starting from such a capitalistically minded beginning?

We're already getting some kind of message out, it seems. By logging on, but not buying, by creating our own communities on the "women's websites" or by making our own sites, we're saying that we are more and want more from women's websites than we're given credit for that we are finding a way to make the internet a place of our own.

Additional Resources

THE STRENGTH TO RESIST: The Media's Impact on Women & Girls RESOURCES

AUDIOVISUAL

The Body Beautiful (video/film), 23 minutes
Women Make Movies, Inc.
462 Broadway, Suite 500
New York, NY 10013
(212)925-0606

Ethnic Notions and Color Adjustment (2 videos)
California Newsreel
149 9th Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
www.newsreel.org

The Famine Within (video), 2 hours
Direct Cinema
P.O. Box 10003
Santa Monica, CA 90410
(800) 525-0000

Fat Chance (video)
Bullfrog Films
P.O. Box 149
Oley, PA 19547
(800) 543-3764

Images of Indians (5-30 min episodes)
www.oyate.org

Mirror Mirror (video/film), 17 minutes
Women Make Movies
462 Broadway, Suite 500
New York, NY 10013
(212)925-060

No Apologies (video), 30 minutes
Wry Crips Disabled Women's Reader's Theatre
P.O. Box 21474
Oakland, CA 94620
(510) 601-5819

Nothing to Lose. A Performance by the Fat Lip Reader's Theatre (video)
Fat Lip Reader's Theatre
P.O. 29963
Oakland, CA 94604
(415) 583-1649

Nothing to Lose: Women's Bodies Image Through Time (video)
Wolfe Video c/o Customer Service
P.O. Box 685195
Austin, TX 78768
(800) 850-5951

Size 10 (film), 20 minutes
Women Make Movies, Inc.
462 Broadway, Suite 500
New York, NY 10013
(212) 925-0606

Skin Trade: Women, Complexion and Caste (videos)
Skin Trading Video Series
89 Walden Street
Cambridge, MA 02140
(617) 354-8657
jhana@msn.com

BOOKS AND LITERATURE

Adolescents / Girls' Self-Esteem

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COURSE SYLLABI

www.umbc.edu/cwit/syllabi.html

ORGANIZATIONS

Body Image / Eating Disorders / Women's Health

Body Image Task Force
P.O. Box 934
Santa Cruz, CA 95061
(408)457-4838
datkins@blue.weeg.uiowa.edu

Boston Women's Health Book Collective
Our Bodies Ourselves
c/o Boston University School of Public Health
Boston, MA
www.bwhc.org

Council on Size and Weight Discrimination
P.O. Box 305
Mt. Marion, NY 12456
(914)678-1209

Eating Disorder Awareness and Prevention (EDAP)

603 Stewart Street, Suite 803

Seattle, WA 98101

(206)382-3587

www.edap.org

Eating Disorder Education Organization

6R20 Edmonton General Hospital

11111 Jasper Avenue

Edmonton, Alberta

Canada T5K 0L6

(780)944-2864

www.edeo.org

The Fat Feminist Caucus of the NAAFA

National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance

P.O. Box 29614

Oakland, CA 94604-9614

Harvard Eating Disorders Center

356 Boylston Street

Boston, MA 02116

(617)236-7766

www.hedc.org

info@hedc.org

National Association of Anorexia Nervosa (ANAD)

Box 7

Highland Park, IL 60035

(847)831-3438

www.anad.org

anad20@aol.com

Real Women Project

The Central Exchange - Education Center

1020 Central Avenue

Kansas City, MO 64105

(816)471-7560

realwomenproject@juno.com

Media Literacy

About-Face

P.O. Box 77665

San Francisco, CA 94107

(415)436-0212
www.about-face.org

Center for Media Education
518-1511 K Street NW
Washington, DC 20005
www.cme.org

The Center for Media Literacy
4727 Wilshire Blvd., #403
Los Angeles, CA 90010
(800) 226-9494
www.medialit.org

Center for Research on the Influences of Television on Children (CRITC)
CRITC, Department of Human Development
4084 Dole Hall
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS 66045
(913) 864-4646
critc@ukans.edu

Dads and Daughters
P.O. Box 3458
Duluth, MN 55803
(888) 824-DADS
www.dadsanddaughters.org

Just Think Foundation
39 Mesa Street, Suite 106
The Presidio
San Francisco, CA 94129
(415) 561-2900
www.justthink.org
think@justthink.org

Media Literacy Online Program
<http://interact.uoregon.edu/medialit/homepage>

Media Scope
12711 Ventura Boulevard, Ste. 440
Studio City, CA 91604
(818) 508-2080
www.mediascope.org
www.mediawatch.org

Multiculturalism/Anti-Racism

Visions, Inc.
545 Concord Ave. Suite 1
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 876-9257

Violence Against Women

Campaign Against Trafficking in Women
University of Rhode Island
Kingston, RI 02881

Family Violence Prevention Fund
383 Rhode Island Street, Suite 304
San Francisco, CA 94103-5133
(415) 252-8900
www.fvpv.org

Join Together Online
441 Stuart Street
Boston, MA 02116
(617) 437-1500
www.jointogether.org

Women and Girls

GIRLS INC.
120 Wall Street, 3rd floor
New York, NY 10005
(212) 509-2000
www.girlsinc.org

G.I.R.L.S.
(Growing Individuals Reacting to Life's Struggles)
www.gis.net/~adena/girls.htm

Sisterhood Is Global Institute
1200 Atwater, Suite 2
Montreal, Quebec
Canada H3Z 1X4
(514) 846-9366
www.sigi.org

Teen Voices Magazine
c/o Women Express
P.O. Box 120-027
Boston, MA 02112-0027
(888)882-TEEN
www.teenvoices.com

WEBSITES

About Face
www.about-face.org

Adbusters
www.adbusters.org

African-American Images in Media
www.usc.edu/isd/archives/ethnicstudies/media_stereotypes.html

Asian Stereotypes: Letter to Hollywood
http://janet.org/~manaa/a_stereotypes.html

The Association for Media and Technology in Education in Canada (AMTEC)
www.amtec.ca

www.cybergrrl.com

www.feminist.com (Amy Richards, from the film, is “Ask Amy”)

The Feminist Majority Foundation
www.feminist.org

Gendercide Watch
www.gendercide.org

Girls, Inc.
www.girlsinc.org

Guerilla Girls
www.guerillagirls.com

www.her-online.com

Native American Stereotypes
www.usc.edu/ids/archives/ethnicstudies/indian_image_bks.html

www.racebridges.org

Resources for Anti-Violence Networks

www.antiviolence.org

www.smartgirl.com

www.webgrrl.com

The Women's Intercultural Network, Inc.

www.win-cawa.org