

MEDIA EDUCATION **FOUNDATION** **STUDY GUIDE**

WHAT A GIRL WANTS

Study Guide Written by
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SYNOPSIS

This video examines the nature and influence of media portrayals of girls by drawing on the insights of an unconventional group of experts: girls themselves. During the Spring of 2000, eleven girls aged 8-16 from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, along with two classrooms of middle and high school students, were interviewed and asked to share their views on media culture and its impact on their lives. Their insightful and provocative responses provide an honest, smart, often moving critique of how media usually get their identities and lives wrong. Taking off from their impressions of teen megastars Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, whose song "What a Girl Wants" provides the inspiration for this video's title, the girls featured here offer a far-ranging dissection of teen pop culture, its icons, and contemporary ideals of femininity.

KEY POINTS

- When young girls are asked what their dreams are and what they want to do with their lives, they reveal goals that are varied and ambitious. The media, however, present limited and narrow definitions of what it means to be a girl -- definitions that tend to revolve around beauty, popularity and sexuality.
- Teenage celebrities Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Jessica Simpson, Mandy Moore and others are viewed as role models by many young girls.
- The self-esteem of many young girls is contingent upon their ability to please boys.
- Companies use teen celebrities such as Jennifer Love Hewitt, Sarah Michelle Gellar, Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera to sell not only their products, but an attitude linked to specific and claustrophobic ideas about femininity.
- Much of the media content (movies, television, music and advertising) targeted at teenage audiences contains both explicit and subtle references to sex.
- Gregory Dark, who directed Britney Spears' video *From the Bottom of My Broken Heart* and Mandy Moore's video *Walk Me Home*, has directed more than forty pornographic films, including *Sex Freaks and Shocking Truth* (1996) and *Psychosexual* (1997).
- As Roger Ebert put it, "Teenagers used to go to the movies to watch adults having sex. Now adults go to the movies to watch teenagers having sex."

PRE-VIEWING EXERCISES

The following exercises are designed to encourage students to think critically about their own consumption of the media *before* they view *What a Girl Wants*. They are also designed to help you assess their attitudes toward the subject of media literacy generally, and to anticipate any resistance you may encounter during discussions about the video and the issues it raises.

1. In their media journals, have students respond to the following questions:
 - a. Do you watch television? Movies? Music videos? If so, why, when and how often?
 - b. What are some of the similarities and differences between the television shows, movies and music videos you watch?
 - c. What, in your opinion, are some positive aspects of the television shows and movies you watch? What are some negative aspects?
 - d. Do you listen to music? If so, what kind, why, when and how often?
 - e. What, in your opinion, are some positive aspects of the music you listen to? What are some negative aspects?

2. Regarding Christina Aguilera's "What a Girls Wants":
 - a. First, read and discuss the written text of the lyrics to Christina Aguilera's song, "What A Girl Wants." <http://www.lyrics007.com/print.php?id=TVRBMU5qQTU>
 - b. What is the song saying? What message(s) do these lyrics send?
 - c. Now listen to the song. Does the music affect the meaning and messages of the lyrics? How? Be specific.
 - d. Watch the music video of Christina Aguilera's "What a Girl Wants" without sound. As you watch, jot down your observations about everything you see. Pay attention to the content and meaning of what you see: what's *happening* in the video? And also pay attention to the style in which this content is delivered, the *way* the video looks: things like clothing, movement, interaction, camera angles, film editing, etc.
 - e. What messages and ideas do you think the video sends? In what ways are they consistent with the messages of the lyrics and music? In what ways do they contradict the messages of the lyrics and music?

3. Have each student write on an individual piece of paper in response to this question: "What do *you* want?" (Encourage students to think of as many things as they can, and to think beyond their material desires). Then collect the papers and separate by gender. On a chalkboard or on large pieces of paper, create two lists (using the students' individual lists) titled "What Girls Want" and "What Boys Want." Put these lists away for use after watching the video.

POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are intended to spark discussion about the general issues the video raises. Questions 1-9 are designed for students in grades 7 to 9, but you may find that some of these questions may also be effective with higher grade levels. The remaining questions are designed for all other students. Of course, you may want to select questions from either grouping that seem most appropriate for your specific grade level.

1. What is your immediate reaction to the video? What did you notice?
2. What ideas were talked about in the video that you hadn't thought about before?
3. What do *you* think Christina Aguilera's song *What a Girl Wants* is about?
4. Do you think that the media care about girls? Explain.
5. Do you watch movies like "Scream?" Why? Why not?
6. Do you look at fashion magazines? Why? Why not?
7. How much influence do you think fashion magazines and movies have over how you and your friends dress and act? How about their influence on the way you look at the world?

Ask of girls:

8. Which girl(s) in the video do you identify with the most? Why?
9. Which girl(s) in the video have opinions similar to your own?
10. What role do fashion magazines play in American culture? What kind of influence do you think they have on the way girls and women look at themselves and the world?
11. What role do teen celebrities play in American culture? Even when these celebrities

are not considered "role models," do you think they have an effect on the way boys and girls view themselves, others, and the world around them?

12. What is the role of advertising in a capitalist society? What do you think goes into making ads? What kind of research?

13. Do you think that the kinds of stories told by advertisements targeted at kids simply reflect what teens are, and what they want? Or do you think ads also play a role in creating these things?

14. What do the mass media tell us about what it means to be American? Is this ideal of America connected to buying things? Is it connected to ideals of femininity and masculinity? What American values are missing from the stories told by the mass media?

15. How do the mass media define what it means to be a girl? A woman? Femininity?

16. How do the mass media define what it means to be a boy? A man? Masculinity?

17. How much overall influence do you think the mass media have over how people define and feel about themselves?

18. Would it make sense for companies to spend millions of dollars every year on advertisements targeted specifically at kids if they didn't think it would affect the way kids think?

19. Do you think that the media should be more responsible for the images that it shows to teenagers? Why? Why not?

TEEN PRODUCTS

"Girls and teenagers are perhaps most vulnerable to beauty-industry propaganda. For them, advertising is a window into adult life, a lesson in what it means to be a woman. And lacking the sophistication of their older sisters and mothers, girls are less likely to distinguish between fact and advertising fiction."

-- Michael F. Jacobsen/ Laurie Anne Mazur

The mainstream media continuously feed young girls the idea that they must be beautiful and sexy to be "real" girls. But this idea contradicts the actual desires and goals of many young teenagers. In recent years, corporate giants have increasingly capitalized on the success of female teenage pop stars such as Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Jessica Simpson and Mandy Moore, and have used them with greater and greater sophistication to gain a foothold in the lucrative teen market. The activities in this section will help students explore and discuss how media use teenage pop stars and celebrities to sell products and a very specific attitude -- one that is highly researched and designed to make kids spend money.

Exercises

Learning Objectives

- To help students explore the messages that advertisements send about what girls and boys want.
- To help students explore the influence that teenage celebrities have on their own desires and self-esteem.

1. Create a gendered advertising collage.

- Make a two-sided collage. On one side, arrange advertising images aimed at girls ages 8-16. On the other side, arrange advertising images aimed at boys ages 8-16.
- Create two new lists, titled "What the Media Says Girls Want" and "What the Media Says Boys Want." Compare and contrast these lists with the lists created by the students prior to viewing the video (See [Pre-Viewing Exercises](#)).
- Think about, discuss or write in response to these questions: Why do media tell us what we want? Why is it good for companies if we think we need the things they tell us we need? In what ways might it be dangerous for us to believe that "the media know best"?

2. Reading images: These photos show Jessica Simpson and Christina Aguilera.



- What do you observe about how these girls are dressed and posed?
- Do you think popular celebrities dress and act like they do completely by choice? Who and what else might influence their choices? Do *you* influence these choices?
- Do you think that popular teen stars such as Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Mandy Moore and Jessica Simpson influence how young girls think about themselves? If so, in what way(s)?
- Do you think these stars influence how boys think about girls? If so, in what way(s)? Might this influence how boys treat girls? Might it influence how boys think about themselves?

3. Media Journal Question

- Do you ever emulate what you see on television or in movies, or what you hear in music? If so, in what ways? When and why?

4. Media Journal Exercise

- Look through a popular teen magazine. Count how many celebrities are in each magazine. Who are they? What are they doing and/or what are they selling?
- Why do you think companies use teen celebrities in advertising? Do you think it works? Why or why not?

[For more information on how companies target teens, go to the website for the PBS documentary "Merchants of Cool" <http://www.pbs.org/frontline/shows/cool>]

PREMATURE TOOTHPICKS

"... the omnipresent media consistently portrays desirable women as thin....even as real women grow heavier, models and beautiful women are portrayed as thinner. In the last two decades we have developed a national cult of thinness. What is considered beautiful has become slimmer and slimmer. For example, in 1950 the White Rock mineral water girl was 5 feet 4 inches tall and weighed 140 pounds. Today she is 5 feet 10 inches and weighs 110 pounds.

Girls compare their own bodies to our cultural ideals and find them wanting. Dieting and dissatisfaction with bodies have become normal reactions to puberty. Girls developed eating disorders when our culture developed a standard of beauty that they couldn't obtain by being healthy. When unnatural thinness became attractive, girls did unnatural things to be thin."

-- Mary Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*

A Note to Educators

It is now normative for teenage girls in the United States to feel dissatisfied with their bodies. This section explores how media create and recycle ideal body images that affect the way real girls see and treat themselves and others. Specific attention is paid to the cult of thinness promoted by media images of girls and women.

The exercises in this section, as well as the content, have the potential to open dialogue. Be prepared for the possibility that students might speak candidly about their own feelings about their bodies.

The teacher or facilitator "should listen acutely to students' personal experiences, even if they are related initially in a hesitant, laughing, or incomplete manner. Such expressions should be encouraged, taken seriously, supported, and explored. The students may be surprised initially at being validated, but then will respond by greater openness and involvement. Most personal sharing will add considerably to the process of the group."

It is possible that a student might reveal to you experiences which may require specialized attention outside of the classroom, such as: serious eating disorders, sexual harassment, physical and sexual abuse. "Under these circumstances, the role of the facilitator [or teacher] is to help with the process of referral of the student to the most appropriate professional for help. This type of referral should be done individually with the student outside of group time. Again, the facilitator is in a unique place to make such referrals about issues or situations that otherwise would have been left unaddressed."

For information about eating disorders, visit <http://www.something-fishy.org>

For information about domestic violence, visit <http://www.ncadv.org>

For information about rape, visit http://kidshealth.org/teen/safety/safebasics/rape_what_to_do.html

Exercises

Learning Objective

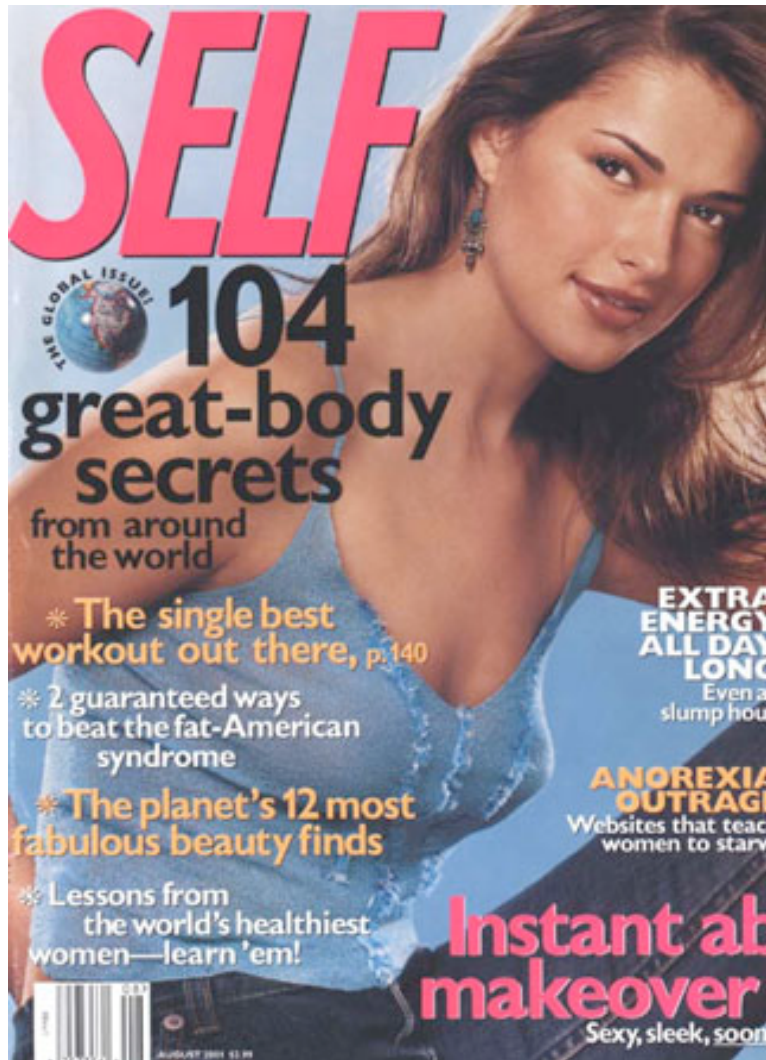
- To help students recognize that the female standard of thinness presented by the media is unrealistic and potentially harmful to girls and women.

1. Watch an hour of prime-time television and record the kinds of commercials, music videos or shows that air. As you watch, count (and record) how many thin and non-thin women you see. In addition, make a chart of the clothes worn and roles played by the thin women versus the non-thin women. (You could also do this activity by looking through fashion magazines.) Follow this exercise up by going to a public place (a mall, a grocery store, a coffee shop, etc.) and noticing the women around you. Count the number of thin and non-thin women you see.

- How do the numbers compare? What do you make of any differences your lists reflect?
- What was different about the ways thin women were portrayed on television versus the way non-thin women were portrayed? Consider things like who was more likeable, attractive to others, stronger? What's your own opinion of this?
- Do you know anyone who is dieting now? How much money and time do you think people spend on dieting? Do diets work? What is anorexia? What is bulimia? Do you know anyone with an eating disorder?

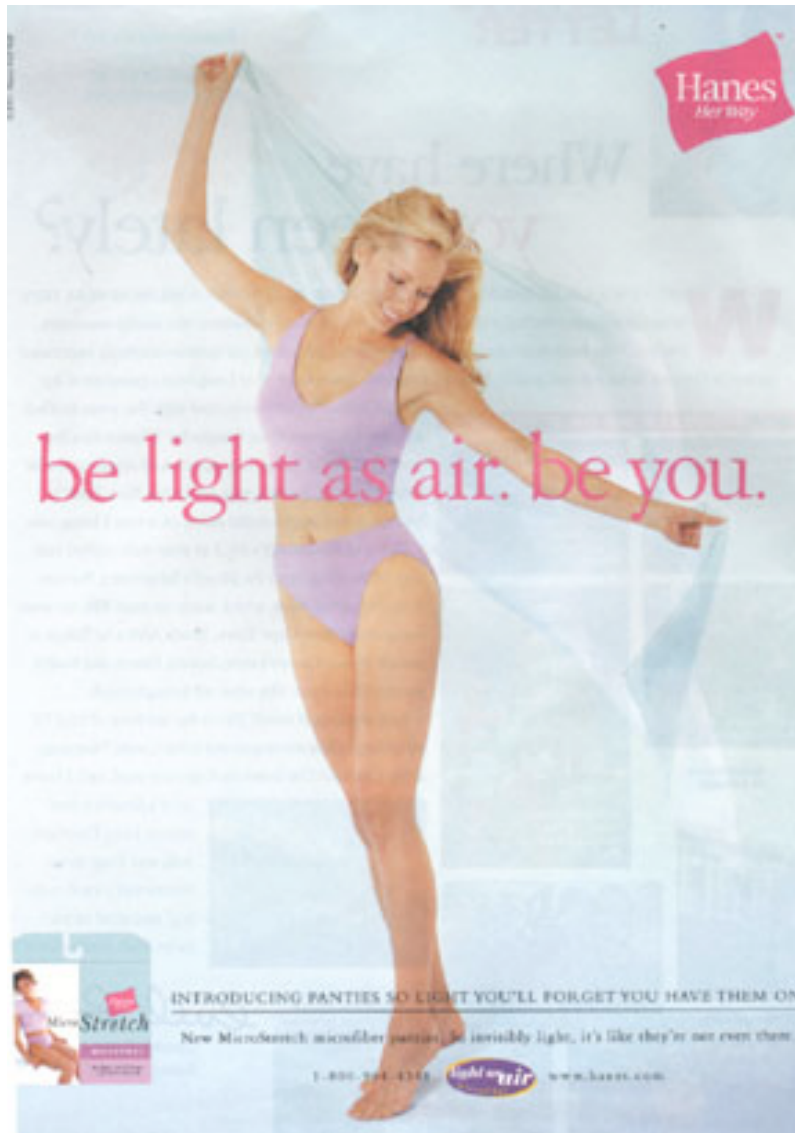
2. On the next page is the August 2001 cover of *SELF* magazine. As you examine it, keep in mind that *SELF* markets itself as a "health and fitness magazine."

- Read the headlines on the cover of *SELF*. Record the focus of each headline.
- Just by looking at the cover of this magazine, can you draw any conclusions about how *SELF* defines "health" and "fitness?"
- How do *you* define "health?" "Fitness?"
- In what ways is it dangerous to measure health with a scale?
- Why do you think so many magazines and other media outlets equate excessive thinness with health for women?
- Is excessive thinness considered healthy for men? Why or why not? What influences do you think are at work here, and why?



3. On the next page is an advertisement that ran in the August 2001 issue of *SELF* magazine. Examine it carefully.

- What is the ad trying to sell?
- Who is the ad targeting?
- What feelings or attitude is the ad trying to create?
- What is the ad saying, implying or promising?
- How is this ad using the desire for thinness to sell their product? What's your personal reaction to this?



4. Media Journal Questions

- Look through a fashion magazine and count the number of thin and non-thin women you see. Do fashion magazines accurately represent the real women you know? How do you feel about the way fashion magazines portray women? Explain.
- For girls: What factors affect the way you think you should look? Do you ever look at models, popular musicians, and actresses and wish you looked more like them? How do you think your life would be different if you looked more like a celebrity? How do you think your life would stay the same? How do you think your life would be different if you didn't care as much about what other people felt about your appearance?

BIG ONES

"... we are a culture obsessed with breasts, and breasts are used to sell absolutely everything. Most women who have had breast implants lose sensation in their breasts. So their breasts become an object of someone else's pleasure rather than pleasurable in themselves. The woman literally moves from being a subject to an object. And yet we all learn very early on that our breasts are never OK the way they are."

-- Jean Kilbourne, *Killing Us Softly III*

There is a constant emphasis in media, one might even say an obsession, with large breasts, and this is yet another source of girls' insecurity. In their article *Sexism and Sexuality in Advertising*, Laurie Anne Mazur and Michael F. Jacobsen cite alarming statistics like the following: "In 1973, Psychology Today reported that one quarter of American women were unhappy with the size or shape of their breasts. By 1986, a similar study found that number had risen to one-third.... Roughly 80 percent of the 150,000 women who have breast implant surgery each year do so for cosmetic reasons, most often to enlarge their breasts." These exercises are intended to help students become more conscious of the media's relentless pressure on girls to worry about breast size.

Exercises

Learning Objective

- To help students learn to think critically about an advertisement's power to create insecurities about one's body in order to sell a product.

1. On the next page is an advertisement for *Aubade* bras. Examine the language and design of the ad.

- What do you notice about the advertisement? (Make as many observations as possible.) What message(s) is it sending?
- What feelings is the advertisement trying to create? Is it effective?
- What is the ad saying, implying or promising?
- What effects might advertisements like this have on teenage girls and the way they think about themselves? What effects might advertisements like this have on teenage boys and the way they think about girls?
- Why do you think some teenage girls want to look like Christina Aguilera, Brittany Spears, Mandy Moore, and other popular stars? Do you see any dangers in wanting to look like someone else? Of wanting to look like a celebrity? Explain.



2. Media Journal Question

- Look through a fashion magazine and find an advertisement that you feel tries to create insecurity about breast size in order to sell a product. Tape or staple the ad into your journal. How do you feel about the existence of this ad and ads like it?

[For more information on this subject, please see *Killing Us Softly 3* and *Slim Hopes*]

GET THE GUY

The July 2001 issue of *Cosmopolitan* displayed the following headlines:

- *His BODY (A USER'S MANUAL):* The Touch, the Tickle, the Pinch! We Guarantee They'll Tantalize Him
- The Cosmo Way to Meet a Man: 30 Genius Opening Lines
- What's Sexy Now: Try It. Taste It. Grab It. Ride It.

Cosmopolitan is not alone in sending the message to young girls and women that their primary goal in life should be to get a man and satisfy him. Many popular teenage magazines also place a heavy emphasis on "getting the guy." The following exercises are intended to help students become more aware of these messages and to explore how and why media inspire girls to base their self-esteem on pleasing boys.

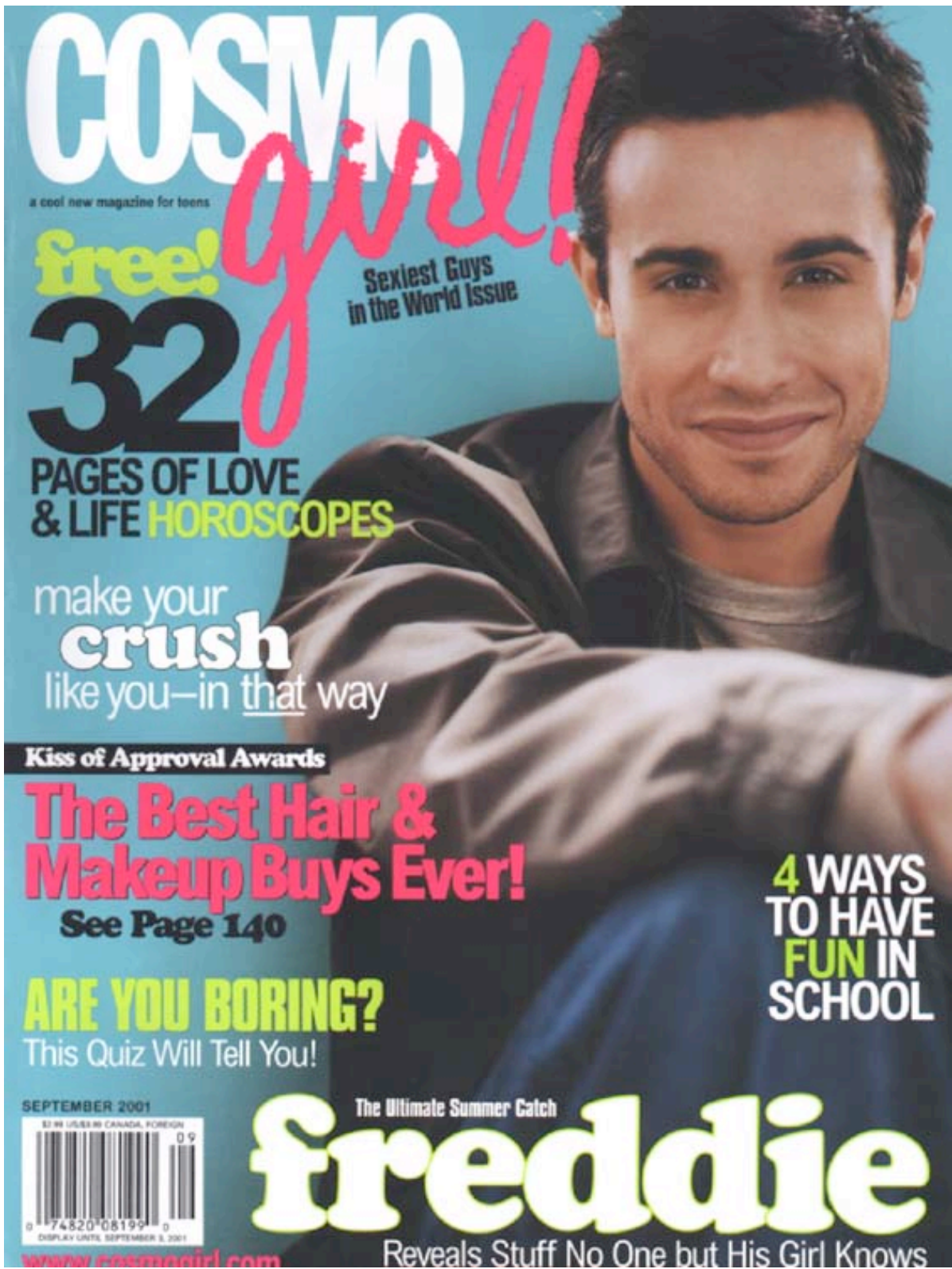
Exercises

Learning Objective

- To help students explore how media pressure young girls to "get the guy," and to provide a forum for them to consider how this can place limits on girls' lives.

1. On the next page is the cover of an issue of the teen magazine *CosmoGirl*. Examine the headlines.

- What do these headlines imply about what it means to be a girl? About what girls do and should want? About how media define "femininity"?
- Based on the girls you know – who they are and what they want – what is missing from these headlines? What other stories and headlines would need to be included to come closer to what you see as reality?
- Why might it be dangerous for girls to base their self-esteem on what boys say about them and whether or not boys like them?
- Do you think that the media place as much pressure on boys to "get the girl" as they do on girls to "get the guy?" Give examples and explain.



2. Below is an advertisement for Asics running shoes.



- What is this advertisement trying to sell?
- Who is the ad trying to target?
- What feeling is the ad trying to create?
- Do you feel it's effective?
- What is the ad saying, implying or promising?
- What is the ad *not* saying?

3. Media Journal Question

- Watch a popular television show that features teenagers. How much time do the girls spend talking about boys? Preparing themselves to look good for boys? What else do the girls do aside from focusing time and attention on boys?

FOLLOW THE LEADER

"I think celebrities have been very effective for us when they wear our clothes when they go out at night. We as a company have turned models into celebrities such as Christy Turlington and Kate Moss. When we used celebrities such as musicians, you do notice them. It appeals to different groups. With new musicians, kids 'in the know' will know them."

-- Sydney Bachman, global creative director of advertising and fashion at Calvin Klein Inc.

This section of the film further explores the ideas introduced in the first section, "Teen Products." These activities are designed to help students continue exploring, perhaps on a deeper level, how media use teen celebrities to sell kids products, ideas and values.

Exercises

Learning Objective

- To help students explore the corporate motivation behind using celebrities in advertising, and to consider the effectiveness and implications of this strategy.

1. On the next page are four advertisements for *Maybelline*, *Redken*, *Neutrogena*, and *Fetish*, all of which appeared in the September 2001 issue of *Seventeen Magazine*. *Maybelline's* ad features Sarah Michelle Gellar; *Redken's* features Jessica Simpson; *Neutrogena's* features Jennifer Love Hewitt; and *Fetish's* features Christina Aguilera.

- Why do you think companies use celebrities to advertise their products? Do you or your friends use any of these products? Why? Why not? Do you think you're more likely to use a product if a celebrity endorses it? Why? Why not?
- What do the models look like in advertisements? What do the music stars look like in videos?
- What would it take to look like them? How much time and money would someone have to spend? Is this the point?

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BOOTY VIDEOS

Sexually explicit songs and videos are deliberately targeted at both the male and female teen markets. Sisco's *The Thong Song* is one such song, and it makes an appearance in this section of the video. Because *The Thong Song* has received a tremendous amount of attention and created a great deal of controversy for its sexual content, the way the girl and the boy in *What a Girl Wants* react to the song raises a number of interesting and important questions – not least because we might expect their responses to be the other way around.

Below are a number of questions designed to guide a discussion of the song – and the kids' reactions to it in the video – before moving onto the other exercises. As a result, you might want to play the song and show its video in class to ensure that all students are familiar enough with it to discuss specifics.

Discussion Questions

In "What a Girl Wants," a young man says, "They treat girls like sex toys, you know like in the thong video. They start degrading the girls, you know what I mean. It's like one guy and a whole bunch of girls around him – so, like, that's basically like the guy is hiring the girl because it seems like they just want 'em for sex."

In contrast, Michelle thinks that *The Thong Song* is "cool," and she can sing all of the words. In fact, her chorus leader led Michelle's class in singing the song.

- If a girl likes the song or a teacher uses it in class, does this mean that the young man is wrong in saying that it degrades girls? Does he need to "lighten up"?
- Are Michelle and her teacher objectifying women when they sing the song?
- Can a young man be more aware than a young woman of how media degrade women?
- What other videos might you consider "booty videos?" What's your opinion of this type of video?

HEY LET'S HAVE SEX

"Our culture is deeply split about sexuality. We raise our daughters to value themselves as whole people, and the media reduces them to bodies. We are taught by movies and television that sophisticated people are free and spontaneous while we are being warned that casual sex can kill us. We're trapped by double binds and impossible expectations."

-- Mary Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia* (2006)

Exercises

Learning Objective

- To help students think critically about some of the sexual pressures media culture places on them.

1. See the study guide for the "Sexual Pressures" section of *Reviving Ophelia* for activities.

2. Media Journal Questions

- In the video, Kate says that Mandy Moore is giving girls the message that they should be as sexy as they can as early as they can. Do you think a girl can be too young to dress or dance like Mandy Moore?
- What messages do stars like Britney Spears, Mandy Moore, and Jennifer Love Hewitt send about love, respect, and relationships?

I COULD BE YOUR DAUGHTER

In recent years, mainstream media have increasingly cashed in by sexualizing young girls and teenagers. More and more, we see teen models and icons captured in seductive poses that draw attention to their bodies. When teenagers emulate the celebrities and models they see again and again in media - whether in dress, style, attitude or behavior - they are in effect emulating a carefully crafted fiction that is expressly designed to be consumed as an object.

Exercises

Learning Objective

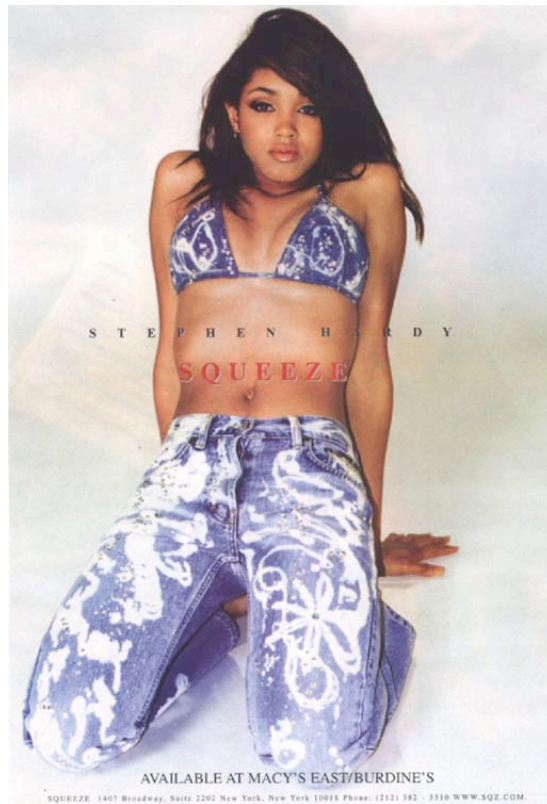
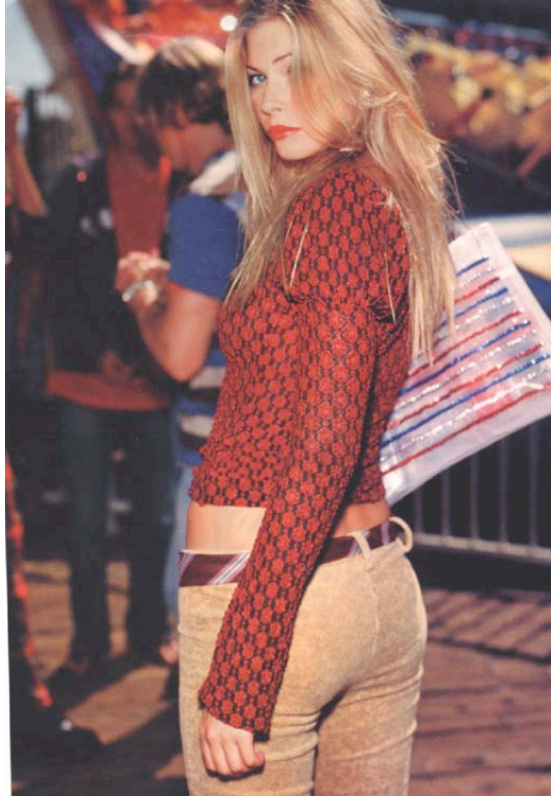
- To help students examine how media sexualize children and teenagers, and to consider the implications.

1. On the next page are three advertisements that ran in the September 2001 issue of *Seventeen* magazine. For each ad, answer the following questions:

- Who is the ad trying to target?
- What is the ad trying to sell?
- What feelings is the ad trying to create? Does it work?
- What is the ad saying, implying or promising?
- How old do you think the model in this advertisement is?

Then answer the following:

- What message(s) do images like these send to young girls about sex?
- What message(s) do images like these send to young boys about sex?
- Images like these, with models approximately the same age, also appear in popular men's magazines. The audience for these magazines ranges from age 14-40+. What do images like these suggest to older men about teenage girls? In what ways might this be dangerous?
- In what ways might it be dangerous for young girls to dress and act like the models and celebrities in magazines?
- If men have seen sexualized images of teenagers, and they then look at teenagers in real life in a sexual way, are they responsible? Why? Why not?



ALL GIRLS GOT KILLED

According to the U.S. Dept. of Justice (March 1998):

- A woman is raped somewhere in America every 2 minutes.
- 1 in 4 women will be raped in her lifetime.
- 32,260 women were murdered by an intimate from 1976-1996.

Media frequently depict women and girls as victims of violence, and often this violence is sexualized. Horror filmmakers are particularly fond of scenes that mix erotica with violent assaults against women, but mainstream companies also regularly run ads that feature both subtle and blatant images of violence and sexuality. Because such images of male violence against women are common, they can come to be seen as normal reflections of the way things are. But what does it mean to make fashion "art" out of this violence? What are the implications and potential repercussions of companies using violence against women to sell things?

Exercises

Learning Objective

- To help students look critically at how media handles the serious issue of men's violence against women.

1. Find a scene from a Hollywood movie in which a young woman is murdered. Find another scene in which a young man is murdered. Compare and contrast the two scenes. Be sure to pay close attention to camera angles, music, the presence or absence of humor, sexual innuendoes, the identity of the murderer, etc.

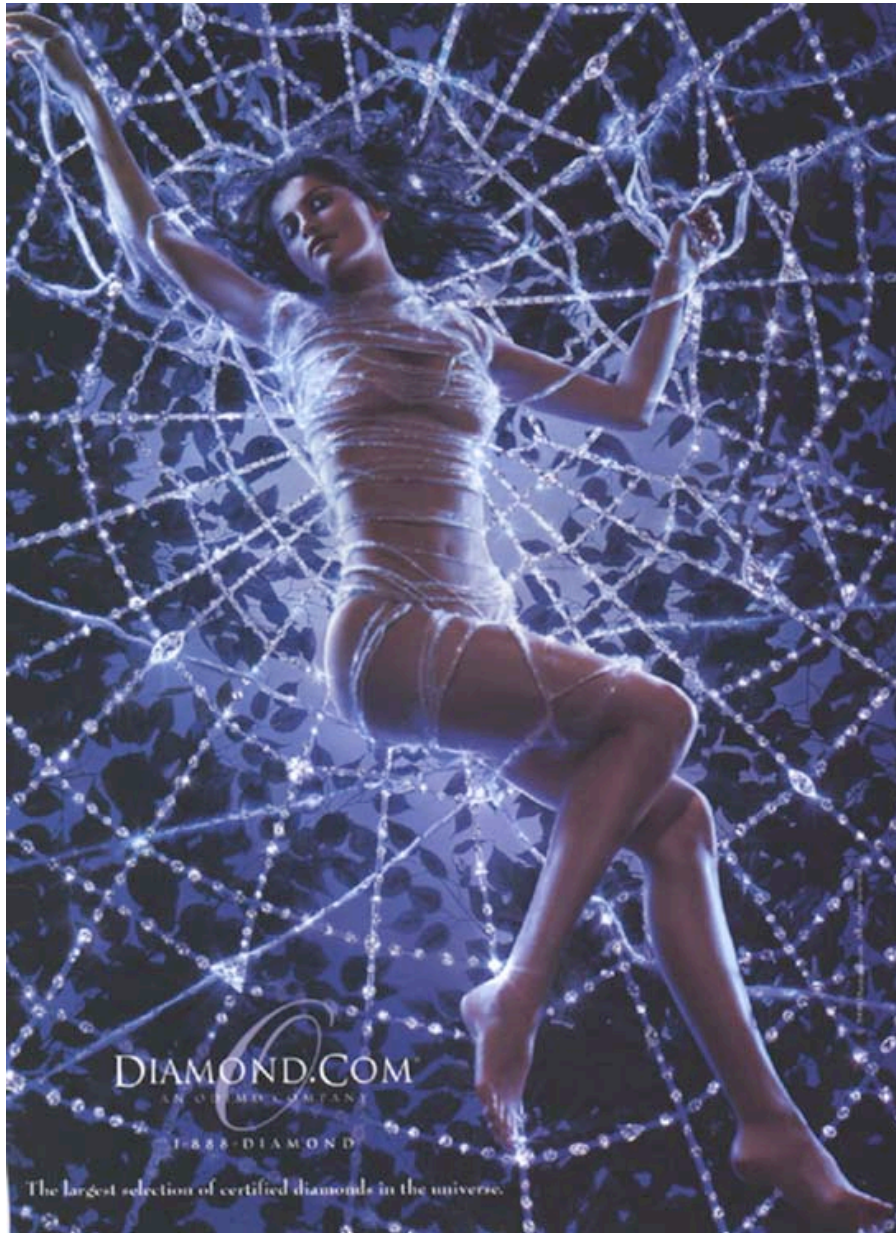
2. Do you think young girls watch movies like "Scream" (in which many, sometimes all, of the female characters are routinely killed) differently from the way young boys watch such films? Explain.

- Would the reactions of girls likely be different when watching films in which male characters are killed? How do you think this kind of film is looked at by young girls?
- What do you think Sienna means when she says she thinks the stabbings in the horror movie *Scream* are "sexual"? Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not? Where else is sex associated with violence?
- Do you feel boys and girls are likely to respond differently to sexualized violence in media? Can you name any examples of sexualized violence against males in Hollywood film?

3. When you look at the Gucci ad below, what do you see? What adjectives would you use to describe the woman? Does this woman look capable of defending herself? Can you imagine seeing a man in the same position this woman is in? Why? Why not?



4. When you look at the Diamond.com ad below, what do you see? What adjectives would you use to describe this woman? Does this woman look capable of defending herself? Does this woman look like a real person with thoughts, opinions and goals? Can you imagine seeing a man in the same position this woman is in? Why? Why not?



How do you feel when you look at advertisements that depict women as passive victims or as objects?

When you see advertisements like the two above, how would you describe media's attitude toward girls, women and femininity generally? Why do you think this attitude is so common in media? Whose interest does it serve?

WRITING EXERCISES

In addition to the suggestion under this heading, there are many writing exercises incorporated into the sectional exercises. For more writing exercises, see the teacher's guide for *Killing Us Softly III*.

1. Watch the video for a second time and track one of the eleven girls interviewed in the video. (The eleven girls are: Kate, Analise, Lindsay, Amanda, Sienna, Celine, Taurina, Michelle, Kristen, Autumn, and Samantha.) Make observations about the individual girl as you watch, paying attention to physical characteristics, points of view, etc.
2. Write a letter to the girl whom you tracked.
3. Write an imaginary letter from the girl to you.

ACTIVISM AND ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

Once students become aware of the pervasiveness of media messages in their lives, it is important for them to know what they can do to resist and change the messages that affect them negatively. Activism and advocacy empower students to use their own voices and to develop healthy, constructive messages.

"It can seem overwhelming. It can seem impossible to change this, but in fact we've made tremendous progress. And let's keep in mind what William Faulkner once said "never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty, and truth, and compassion against injustice, and lying, and greed. If people all over the world, in thousands of rooms like this one would do this it would change the Earth." We can do this in many ways. We of course should applaud positive images and we should protest damaging ones. But most important, we need to get involved in whatever way moves us to change not just the ads, but these attitudes that run so deep in our culture and that affect each one of us so deeply, whether we're conscious of it or not. Because what's at stake for all of us, men and women, boys and girls, is our ability to live authentic and freely chosen lives, nothing less."

-- Jean Kilbourne

The following activities create opportunities for students to act on their opinions about the media and to create their own media.

1. Is there a specific ad that offends you? Why? Does the ad perpetuate stereotypes? Promote eating disorders? Silence women? Normalize violent behavior for men and boys? Are there billboards near your school for alcohol or cigarettes that add to the cultural climate of abuse and addiction? Choose an advertisement that you have a strong opinion about (either positive or negative), and write a letter to the Marketing Director of the company or the Editor of the magazine in which it was published. Be sure to include what you notice in the ad (observations), the messages that the ad is sending to its viewers and the possible consequences of these messages in society.

For instructions on how to write this letter, visit <http://www.fair.org/activism/activismkit.html>. For a collection of offensive ads, go to <http://about-face.org> and click "Gallery of Offenders."

2. Is there an ad that you like, that you think sends positive message? Why? Does the ad combat stereotypes? Offer alternative forms of femininity or masculinity? Use diverse body types? Empower women? Repeat the activity in #1, but *praise* an advertisement that you think sends positive messages.

For a collection of positive ads, visit <http://about-face.org/light/progress/galleries.html>.

3. Check out the media literacy websites on the Media Education Foundation's resource page. Join a watchdog program. Get involved!

4. Create your own alternative magazine. Write articles that are empowering. Create advertisements that are positive. Make thoughtful, conscious choices.

5. Create a magazine that satirizes a popular fashion magazine. Write articles that accentuate the messages that you currently notice. Create extreme advertisements.

6. Create an educational video that will help educate your peers about the media. Think about organization and presentation. Be sure to use plenty of examples! (Show it to a class or a group of parents.)

7. Write a song - or poem - that expresses your views about the media and the cultural pressures.

8. Create an art project that expresses the pressures young people feel from the media. (Ex. Project onto a mirror the way the media makes you feel about your body.) Be creative!

9. Coordinate Inside Out Day at your school. Ask students to come to school wearing a t-shirt inside out. Encourage them to write aspects of their inner selves on their shirts (i.e. "I like poetry," "I like sunsets," "I like hugs," etc.) to symbolize "It's what's inside that counts." Have laundry markers and masking tape available. In addition, cover all of the bathroom mirrors with butcher paper. Write inspirational messages and draw colorful pictures on the butcher paper.