

MEDIA EDUCATION
FOUNDATION
STUDY GUIDE

GENERATION M:

MISOGYNY IN MEDIA AND CULTURE

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NOTE TO TEACHERS

This study guide is designed to help you and your students engage and manage the information presented in this video. Given that it can be difficult to teach visual content—and difficult for students to recall detailed information from videos after viewing them—the intention here is to give you a tool to help your students slow down and deepen their thinking about the specific issues this video addresses. With this in mind, we’ve structured the guide so that you have the option of focusing in depth on one section of the video at a time. We’ve also set it up to help you stay close to the video’s main line of argument as it unfolds. The structure of the guide therefore mirrors the structure of the video, moving through each of the video’s sections with a series of key summary points, questions, and assignments specific to that section.

Pre-viewing Discussion Questions are designed to improve preliminary discussion about the issues the video addresses prior to viewing.

Key Points provide a concise and comprehensive summary of each section of the video. They are designed to make it easier for you and your students to recall the details of the video during class discussions, and as a reference point for students as they work on assignments.

Discussion Questions provide a series of questions designed to help you review and clarify material for your students; to encourage students to reflect critically on this material during class discussions; and to prompt and guide their written reactions to the video before and after these discussions. These questions can therefore be used in different ways: as guideposts for class discussion, as a framework for smaller group discussion and presentations, or as self-standing, in-class writing assignments (i.e. as prompts for “free-writing” or in-class reaction papers in which students are asked to write spontaneously and informally while the video is fresh in their mind).

Assignments for each section encourage students to engage the video in more depth—by conducting research, working on individual and group projects, putting together presentations, and composing formal essays. These assignments are designed to challenge students to show command of the material presented in the video, to think critically and independently about this material from a number of different perspectives, and to develop and defend their own point of view on the issues at stake.

OVERVIEW

In *Generation M: Misogyny in Media and Culture*, Thomas Keith critically examines the extent to which sexism and misogyny continue to proliferate mass media and the culture that consumes media. Keith's primary argument is that media continues to churn out sexist and misogynist images and stereotypes at a time when many in our culture believe that sexism is mainly a thing of the past. At the same time, hypersexuality is being marketed to young women as what it means to be powerful as a woman in our culture. But viewing women as being primarily sexual objects, or beings that should care principally about their looks, is to marginalize women into a second-class of citizen that is not given the same respect and authority as men. The film unfolds by demonstrating how the devaluing of women by media and our culture that financially supports media is created and reinforced, culminating in the trivializing, mistreatment, and even violence against women.

Special Note: This video features sexualized images that may be offensive to some. There is also strong language in some places. It is important that educators preview the film prior to screening it with their students. It is also advised that ample time for discussion of the impact of these images and arguments is allowed at each screening.

PRE-VIEWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can you provide some examples of women you admire in popular culture today? What is it about these women that you admire? How important do you think it is for women to be beautiful or physically attractive? In your opinion, is it easier for "attractive women" to succeed than "unattractive women" in our culture? If so, why?
2. For Females: How many of you were raised playing with dolls or toys thought to be "feminine toys?" For males: How many of you were raised playing with toys or games thought to be "masculine toys?" Can you provide some examples? Are dolls such as Barbie and Bratz becoming too sexual or do you feel they are fine as they are?
3. At what age were you on your first diet? Do you think there is more pressure for women to stay thin as opposed to men? Why or why not? Are there things about the way you look that you would like to change? Have you ever seen pictures of fashion models or film stars and wished you could look like them?
4. Do you believe there are jobs better suited for women and others better suited for men? If so, which ones and why? Imagine you are a parent. Are there lessons you would want to instill in your child, and would those lessons be any different depending on whether your child was a boy or a girl? Do you believe men make better leaders than women? Why or why not?
5. Do you agree with the idea that sexism is not condemned to the same degree as racism? If so, why do you think this is? Why do you believe that we see more older male journalists on TV as opposed to older female journalists? Why is it that males find artists like Eminem and games like Grand Theft Auto appealing? Do these forms of entertainment bother you?

INTRODUCTION

Key Points

- The filmmaker makes the point that male students in college may be scrutinized by peers for taking courses in women's studies.
- He then reports that his own colleagues have asked why he decided to make a film about misogyny, suggesting that it was an "odd" subject for him to address.
- He suggests that men are taught to believe that issues of sexism and misogyny should be examined by women rather than men.
- This is one of the ways that issues of sexism in our society are marginalized and devalued.
- Men are subtly, and not so subtly, instructed that they should not care about things like sexist media images, sexual assault, dating and intimate partner violence, and sexual harassment.
- But this is a big part of the problem. Boys and men do not see the importance of these issues in their own lives.
- As a philosophy professor, the filmmaker sees a problem with the way that academic subjects are approached, that certain disciplines, such as philosophy, view the issues in this film as not proper to the concerns of philosophy.
- Some academic disciplines compartmentalize subjects, thereby underexposing, and even trivializing, some important issues to students of those disciplines.
- Sexism and misogyny are issues that are under-examined and trivialized in academia today. This lack of examination contributes to the continued proliferation of sexism in our society.

Discussion Questions

1. In which classes, if any, have you investigated the issue of sexism in our society?
2. Do you believe the subject should be more prominently featured in high school and college classes? If so, identify some of the classes and disciplines that should feature this issue?
3. If you are a male, would you feel uncomfortable taking a “Women’s Studies” course? Why or why not? If you are a female, would you feel uncomfortable taking a course in auto maintenance or engineering? Why or why not? Do you think your friends would make fun of you if you took what are believed to be “gender-inappropriate” classes?
4. Do you agree with the filmmaker that media today are flooded with sexist images? Can you provide some examples?

Assignments

1. Cut out and bring to class five ads from magazines that you believe to be sexist ads. Be prepared to explain in class what aspect of the ad is sexist, and why sexist ads are harmful.
2. Research the sales numbers of companies, such as Carl’s Jr., which have been scrutinized for their sexist ads, to see whether their approach has led to increased sales numbers. Be prepared to present your findings to the class and explain to whom these sorts of marketing approaches appeal and why.
3. Rate, on a scale of 1–10, the degree to which sexism is a problem in our society today, and explain your rating.
4. Create and prioritize a list of influences that contribute to sexism and the devaluing of what is considered to be feminine in our society. Be prepared to discuss your list.

FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

Key Points

- The filmmaker makes the point that sexuality is being sold to girls and young women as a form of “female empowerment.”
- The filmmaker also makes the point that kids admire and emulate music, film, and TV stars.
- However, in the past decade, many female music stars, film stars, and TV stars have adopted a hypersexual persona.
- This hypersexual persona is a ploy used by record companies, film studios, and advertisers to attract young consumers.
- Since kids and young adults are attracted to sexualized images, and since many kids look up to the stars who have adopted this persona, it is common to see young girls adopting this same look in order to fit in, to be accepted by their peers.
- There has been a noticeable “ratcheting up” of the sexualization of young female stars, if you trace the evolution of the depiction of female celebrities over the past forty or fifty years.
- One serious consequence of the hypersexualization of girls and young women in media and culture is that boys and young men begin to view women as sexual objects.
- When people are viewed as sexual objects, the stage is set for the mistreatment of those people.
- The mistreatment of women can take the form of trivializing women and their opinions, sexually objectifying women, men feeling that they can sexually harass women, that women are possessions, and even rape and murder.
- Chapter 1 ends with the observation that another generation of women are being trained to contribute to their own exploitation, to “stroke men’s egos,” and to not challenge male supremacy.

Discussion Questions

1. Who are the young, female celebrities that you admire? If you do not admire any young, female celebrities, explain why not.
2. Assess the commercials for Carl's Jr. over the past few years. Do you find them to be sexist? Explain.
3. What is your judgment about artists such as Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Fergie, Pussycat Dolls, Mariah Carey, and more recently, Rhianna and Miley Cyrus? Do they promote a positive or negative message to girls?
4. Why do you feel that thought-provoking artists like Sarah McLachlan and Alicia Keys are much rarer than Pussycat Dolls-type artists these days?
5. Do you feel that female music artists are promoted differently than male music artists? Explain.
6. Do you notice teen and pre-teen girls dressing and acting sexual and more adult than you would expect of their age? If so, what is your concern about this phenomenon?

Assignments

1. Go to artists' lyrics websites, such as Mariah Carey's, and write down the lyrics to some of her songs ("Touch My Body" or "I'll Be Lovin' U Long Time," as examples). Read the lyrics in class and discuss what you think about them.
2. Prepare a short paper evaluating Christina Aguilera's songs "Beautiful" and "Dirrty." Explain whether you find inconsistencies in the messages. (The first is often thought to be positive and the other not so.) Are young girls able to discern the message of songs like "Dirrty," in your opinion?
3. Construct pro-con styled debates over the positive or negative messages found in quasi-reality shows such as Laguna Beach or The Hills, or scripted dramas such as Desperate Housewives.
4. View Jean Kilbourne's video *Killing Us Softly 3* and then either write a paper or lead a discussion on the use of sexist ads in magazines, billboards, television, and other media sources. Address the ways that you believe these sexist images affect us.
5. Interview your friends, or teen and pre-teen brothers and sisters, to find whether they are fans of the artists featured in the first chapter of the film. If they are fans, document the reasons they give for being fans of these artists and be prepared to share your findings in class.

THE DOLL WARS

Key Points

- Dolls are sold to little girls and have been for generations.
- The companies that produce dolls also sell views of femininity such as the ideal that girls should place their physical appearance high on the list of importance, that girls should dream of becoming “mommies,” and that girls should care about shopping as a central part of being female.
- Recently, dolls have become hypersexual with the emergence of “Bratz dolls” and “Lingerie Barbie.”
- Since dolls are principally sold to young girls, these girls are exposed to the idea of being sexual at a young age, and this exposure normalizes the idea to young girls that hypersexuality is an important part of being female.
- The same hypersexuality that is found in some of the dolls of our time is also seen in beauty contests for very young girls, where girls compete with other young girls in an effort to appear much older than they are.
- Along with dolls and beauty contests, cartoon images, including anime images, have become quite sexual in appearance.
- The filmmaker concludes that hypersexuality is sold to girls at an increasingly younger age than at any time in the past in the U.S.
- As a result, girls are being trained to think of themselves as consumers and shoppers, first and foremost, as well as sexual beings who should care primarily about the way they look.
- This “training” means that it should be no surprise to anyone that girls and young women are under enormous pressure to conform to standards of beauty and sexuality that our culture has placed upon them.
- By the time girls become young women, they are collectively spending billions of dollars on their appearance, whether this has to do with diets, cosmetics, beauty supplies and products, fashion, or cosmetic surgery.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think of the “Lingerie Barbie” line? What about Bratz Dolls, Lollipop Girls, or “Top Model” dolls that have hit the market?
2. If you had a daughter, would you have a problem allowing her to play with these dolls? Would you automatically give her dolls, little ovens, and fashion/makeup toys as opposed to big trucks, guns, and video games?
3. What kinds of toys and entertainment products do you believe are appropriate for kids, and should parents concern themselves with the alleged gendered nature of the toy?
4. Do you agree with the filmmaker that some toys and images have become much more sexual over the past few years? Why or why not?
5. As consumers, what sort of power do you believe we have over the production of hypersexual toys and images that target kids?
6. Does the rating system in the corner of the TV help, hurt, or have no effect on the viewing habits of kids? Why or why not?
7. Should “Lingerie Barbie” be given a rating label like those found on TV, games, and films? Why or why not?

Assignments

1. Go to the online sites of stores like Target, Toys R Us, and others. Search through the dolls and other toys offered. Make a list of those you would not give to your child. Make a second list of those you find to be appropriate. Explain the difference between the two lists.
2. View TV shows designed for kids, including shows on networks like “Teen-Nick” that produce shows for pre-teens. Write a commentary on the shows you view, and pay particular attention to the advertisements. Describe the product and how it was marketed.
3. Conduct research from the American Academy of Pediatrics and report on the findings of experts in child development on toys, games, TV, and other entertainment products. See what kinds of advice they are giving and why they came to their conclusions.
4. Many sources report that the U.S. has the highest rate of teen pregnancy in the developed world. Conduct research to find what experts have to say about the

- contributing factors to this phenomenon, and the extent to which the sexualization of girls in our society plays a role. Write an essay that documents your findings.
5. Conduct research on the toys of the 70's versus the toys of today. What, if any, difference do you see, outside of the development of technology? That is, how has the content of the toys changed? Do you view these changes as positive, negative, or neutral? Defend your answer.
 6. This exercise is the same as exercise 5 with the following addition: Pay specific attention to whether the toy or product is being marketed to girls or to boys, then write an evaluative response to these marketing strategies. That is, even though toys have always been marketed by gender, do you see a shift toward more sexual, as opposed to “domestic,” images directed toward girls (sexualized fashion dolls as opposed to “easy-bake ovens”). Argue what impact these changes might have in the lives of girls and women.
 7. Throughout the film, the filmmaker argues that girls today are being trained by media and culture to care about their appearance more than other traits, and that girls are specifically told to be sexual in order to be accepted in our society. Defend or criticize this view in a short paper and be sure to discuss what you take to be the consequences, whether positive or negative, of your conclusion.

IDEALIZED BEAUTY

Key Points

- Girls and young women are bombarded with images of idealized beauty in magazines that feature airbrushed and digitally altered images of models and female celebrities.
- The digital alteration is designed to remove any “flaws” that the editor believes will take away from the model’s perfection.
- Many girls and young women see these images and aspire to look as perfect as the models and celebrities featured.
- Advertisers exploit this desire by instructing women that they are not perfect, but that they can be perfect if they simply use the right products and services.
- However, one of several tragic consequences for this quest of perfection is the emergence of eating disorders.
- Girls see models and celebrities who appear to be very thin, and this archetype of thinness becomes a goal for many girls to try to attain.
- At the same time, eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa, are serious illnesses that claim the lives of thousands of young women every year throughout the world.
- It is also the case that anorexia is an illness that overwhelmingly afflicts females rather than males.
- In addition to eating disorders, cosmetic surgery has quadrupled over the past decade.
- Like anorexia, 91% of elective cosmetic surgery is undertaken by women.
- The filmmaker concludes that women are targeted at an early age to place their physical appearance as a top priority in their lives.
- Girls and women are constantly “reminded” about their “physical flaws” by media, parents, friends, and the culture in general, which places enormous pressure on women to try to live up to the standards of beauty that has been created, packaged, and marketed by this same media conglomerate.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think when you look at the cover of a magazine that features what appears to be a flawlessly beautiful woman?
2. What is your reaction when you see words like “sexy” and “hot” on the cover of magazines that specifically target teens and pre-teens?
3. What is your reaction when you see that the cosmetics industry is flourishing, pulling in billions of dollars each year, and knowing that it is women who are purchasing these items?
4. On the subject of eating disorders, do you agree that media play a role in the lives of girls and women who develop illnesses like anorexia? Why or why not?
5. Do you believe there ought to be greater responsibility taken by media giants who sell magazines and beauty ideals? If so, what do you believe ought to be done?
6. On the subject of cosmetic surgery, do you think it is positive, negative, or neutral that millions of women in our society opt for cosmetic surgery?
7. Are there procedures that you believe are fine and others that are questionable? If so, identify and explain.
8. Why do you believe that 91% of cosmetic surgery is performed on women?
9. What do you think about the things the Beverly Hills cosmetic surgeon said in the film? Do you believe someone like that has a conflict of interest? Why or why not?

Assignments

1. Go online to <http://www.Dove.us/>. Examine Dove’s “Real Beauty” campaign and write a short essay on what you think about it.
2. Bring a fashion magazine or a teen magazine to class. Be prepared to discuss the pictures and the copy that are found in the magazine.
3. Conduct research to identify the causes and solutions of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa. In a paper, document the opinions of experts in the field along with their recommendations for patients, parents of patients, and young people in general on how to avoid these disorders.
4. Conduct research to discover the most popular cosmetic surgical procedures today. Be prepared to lead a class discussion on your findings along with your views on why these particular procedures are popular. You should also comment about why you believe women outnumber men as patients of these procedures at a rate of roughly 9 to 1.

THE PINK-BLUE DICHOTOMY

Key Points

- The filmmaker begins by examining the way that sports and hobbies are often split into those appropriate for males and those appropriate for females, according to our culture.
- We are then introduced to the notion of “Gender Training” as a form of socialization: the process of adapting to the norms or expectations of a social group.
- Gender training begins when we are born, as parents and family members reward and punish certain behavior to reinforce the idea that boys should behave one way and girls should behave another way.
- Jean Kilbourne notes that this kind of deliberate, but arbitrary, splitting of the sexes does enormous harm, as boys are taught to be tough, aggressive, and unemotional, while girls are taught to be passive and dependent.
- Ms. Kilbourne also makes the point that we are losing out by denying traits that we all possess such as compassion, caring, and empathy, that our culture does not support these sorts of traits, particularly in men.
- The consequence of this particular aspect of gender training is that boys and men are taught to be aggressive and to ridicule other boys and men who show compassionate behavior, while girls and women are taught to place a great part of their identities in their appearance.
- Karen Sternheimer notes that we see this sort of gender training in the toys and games that are marketed exclusively for boys or exclusively for girls.
- Kimberly Salter adds that the split in gender can be seen throughout the corporate world. As CEO’s and business leaders are predominantly men, while women are found more often in non-profit organizations.
- We can view the gender-trained split if we examine the majors that college students gravitate toward and the careers they ultimately choose. Nursing is still considered to be a career that is appropriate for women, while engineering and law enforcement are male-driven occupations.
- The filmmaker then addresses his critics who claim that boys and girls are “just different,” that they are “made that way” by noting that experts in behavioral genetics and those who understand hormonal influences in our behavior agree that

“environment and upbringing” are the major components involved in why we behave as we do.

- The reasoning that boys and girls are “just different” led in the past to the false idea that women should not go to college, because they were “not cut out for that sort of thing.”
- Yet today, women outnumber men at an almost two-to-one ratio in colleges and universities nationwide.
- This means that more women will be gaining positions of business and political power in the future.
- At the same time, our prisons are overcrowded, mainly with men.
- The filmmaker concludes that part, and perhaps a major part, of the problem between those who succeed and those who become part of the prison population is a function of the way we are training our boys to be men, and this gender training is reinforced throughout the pervasive media system of music, games, TV, film, sports, and numerous channels of entertainment product.

Discussion Questions

1. In your own life, try to remember the first time that someone in your family encouraged you to play or dress a certain way and discouraged you to dress or play another way along traditional gender lines. Do you believe this reinforcement conditioned the way you think of yourself today?
2. Why do you think gender roles are still policed as rigorously as they are today?
3. Why do you believe our culture ridicules males who get into occupations like nursing? Conversely, why do you believe our culture finds it odd when a female shows interest in and aptitude for subjects like math and science?
4. Do you believe there are subjects or occupations that are better suited for men than women? Explain.
5. Why do you believe it is that men outnumber women in prison by a wide margin, and particularly with respect to violent crimes?
6. Why do you believe it is that women outnumber men as students in colleges and universities nationwide, and that women are graduating at higher rates?

7. When you think about college-aged women as they are depicted in media, do you believe the depictions are accurate? If they are inaccurate, in what ways are they inaccurate and why do you believe media churn out these stereotypes?
8. As the title of this chapter is “The Pink-Blue Dichotomy,” do you agree or disagree with the filmmaker that there is a pink-blue dichotomy with respect to the ways that media and culture depict and treat gender roles? If so, what is some of the fallout of splitting gender in these ways? Are there things you would like to see done to improve gender depiction and treatment? Explain.

Assignments

1. Go to a toy store or go online to a department store chain that carries toys and games. Make a list of the games and toys that have been marketed strictly for girls and those for boys. Be prepared to lead a discussion or write a short essay on what you feel are the positives and/or negatives about splitting games and toys in this way. Are there themes that you interpret as being male or female with respect to toys and games, such as weapons versus cosmetics?
2. Conduct research, perhaps from the Census Bureau, on the demographic makeup of occupations with an emphasis on the numbers of men versus women employed in these fields. For instance, in the film it was stated that there are far more men in positions of corporate power as opposed to non-profit organizations. Write an essay that documents your findings and that helps us understand why certain occupations are stratified by gender to the extent that they are.
3. The filmmaker argued that environmental influences are more important than hormonal influences when it comes to violent or hypersexual behavior. In fact, Dr. Keith argues that through environmental conditioning, we can raise a child to be a violent adult just as we can train a puppy to be a violent dog. Read Dr. Theresa Crenshaw’s book *The Alchemy of Love and Lust* and determine whether Dr. Crenshaw agrees with Keith’s conclusion. Write a short essay defending your view.
4. Make a list of TV, film, and commercial characters that represent a male or female stereotype. Be prepared to present in class your list and an explanation of how these characters qualify as stereotypes. Include your views about stereotypes, their impact on us, the ways in which they might influence our thinking about men and women, boys and girls. (These same points can be made about racial stereotypes or stereotypes involving sexual orientation.)

MISOGYNY AND DOUBLE STANDARDS

Key Points

- This chapter begins with the vulgar lyrics of the song “Kim” by rapper Eminem, who raps about killing his wife in explicit and violent terms.
- Yet many fans of artists like Eminem dismiss criticism as not understanding the satire and the fact that music is “just entertainment.”
- At the same time, Eminem is sold to popular culture as a sexual icon every bit as much as he is a musical icon.
- The promotion of angry, violent young men by the music industry conditions boys and girls to see this kind of persona as an attractive persona worthy of emulation by boys and men. But it also conditions girls and young women to find men like this to be attractive.
- Byron Hurt reinforces this point by noting that many young men adopt the tough-guy persona in an attempt to attract young women who claim that they do not want a man who is “soft.”
- Eminem also comes to the fore in this chapter due to the fact that he is white and has made a public point of not using the “n-word” in any of his rhymes.
- But his proclamation that he will not use the “n-word” serves to illustrate a double standard in his music, and a double standard within our society at large: racism will be met with great acrimony, while sexism will be met with little or no condemnation.
- In fact, as the success of artists like Eminem show, sexism can be enormously profitable in our society.
- Radio personality Tom Leykis has made a career out of instructing boys and young men to disrespect women by treating them as sexual objects that should be discarded after using them for sexual gratification.
- Mr. Leykis also enjoys the distinction of being rated number one for his time slot, which means, of course, that millions of people, and mainly boys and young men, listen to him.
- But we see this same sort of sexism with other popular figures, such as Rush Limbaugh and Pat Robertson, both of whom enjoy enormous success with fans and followers throughout the country.

- Since none of these figures could get away with racist remarks without a great deal of public outrage, we are forced to conclude that racism and sexism are treated in an entirely different manner in our society.
- The double standard also extends into mainstream media if we consider the fact that male news anchors enjoy longer on-screen careers than their female counterparts.
- The filmmaker concludes that sexism is tolerated and even applauded in our culture, which leads to media's exploitation of sexism as a tool for profit.
- The filmmaker ends by encouraging each of us to take personal responsibility for the media we consume and the choices we make in our lives, to stop tolerating sexist images, stereotypes, and entertainment. Since those who produce sexist media will continue to do so as long as there are profits to be had, our refusal to participate in sexist media and to purchase sexist products can force producers to create more enlightened forms of media entertainment for public consumption.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think about Eminem as an artist and others like him who employ sexist and misogynist themes in their music? What do you make of the objection that "it is only entertainment?"
2. Do you agree that many artists who use sexist and misogynist lyrics are marketed as sexual icons, and if so, what are your concerns about this?
3. What do you make of Eminem's stand that he will not use the "n-word," while he liberally uses the "b-word" and the "h-word?"
4. Do you agree with the filmmaker that we have a double standard in our society when it comes to the way that we treat racism as opposed to sexism? If so, why do you believe we, as a culture, do not condemn sexism with the same rigor and passion?
5. What is your reaction to the speech by Tom Leykis about dating? Do you think it is another example of "just being entertainment," or is it another example of a radio-talk personality being irresponsible and dangerous?
6. At a time when our country has embraced more women in positions of political power, why do you believe Rush Limbaugh uses derisive and sexist language when referring to his opponents who are female? Do you agree with the filmmaker that Limbaugh would never make fun of someone being a man? What does that tell us about his criticism?

7. Think about the first time you heard the term ‘feminism.’ Was it presented to you in a positive or negative way? What were the ideas presented to you about feminism from whomever exposed you to the term?
8. After viewing the film, has your idea about feminism changed? Why or why not?
9. Why do you believe it is that male news anchors can enjoy on-screen careers that span into their 60’s or 70’s, while female news anchors are typically young and attractive?
10. What was your reaction to the scene in the film that captured the brutalizing of a woman in the game Grand Theft Auto? Some argue that this is only a small part of the game’s options for young gamers. Do you accept this defense? Why or why not?
11. Why do gamers, particularly young males, find violent, sexist games to be entertaining? The filmmaker made the point that the response, “it is something you can’t do in everyday life” is an empty and disingenuous response. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Assignments

1. Go to lyric websites and print out lyrics by Eminem, Ludacris, Nelly, 50 cent, and others. Bring lyrics to class for a class discussion on the content of the lyrics of these artists and what impact they may have in the lives of young fans.
2. Bring ads and media images to class that depict women or speak about women in demeaning ways. Lead a class discussion to get the views of classmates on what would happen to the companies or networks that produce these sexist images if they replaced the demeaning feature about women with demeaning images or words about ethnicity. You can turn this into a round-table discussion about the double-standard and why you feel it is allowed to persist.
3. Read Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, where she discusses the gender construction of women in the middle of the 20th century. To what extent do you think things have changed, if any? Write a short essay making your case.
4. Conduct a blind survey in class, where students do not write their names on the paper. Ask students to respond to the question and explain, “Are you a fan of the Tom Leykis or Howard Stern shows?” Just before turning in their response paper, ask students to write ‘male’ or female’ at the top of the page. Collect the papers and read the first entry of each. Use these comments to conduct an open discussion about the answers and the possibility of gendered responses.

BONUS FEATURE: MEDIA LITERACY, EDUCATION, AND CHOICE

Key Points

- Tessa Jolls defines ‘media literacy’ and spells out the 5 questions of media literacy.
- J.W. Wiley discusses the need for educators to become more aware of their own problematic “isms,” including sexism, so that we might create better teaching environments for students, while getting young people to think critically about the ways they have been conditioned to think about themselves and others.
- Kimberly Salter asks us to think in terms of inclusiveness instead of creating issues of specialization that can marginalize issues. So, women’s issues should be thought of and taught in terms of being human issues.
- Alvin Poussaint discusses the consumerism that has captured young people today. As corporations think of kids as consumers, the brightest minds on Madison Avenue create strategies to get kids to purchase products and place too much importance on materialism and the quest for the conforming pressure of being cool.
- Ms. Jolls ends this segment by reminding us that we all have power, that we are not victims, rather that we are contributors. Thinking critically to make wise decisions about the media we consume is central to empowerment and media literacy.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is media literacy important and at what age should it begin?
2. How can we get kids to take media literacy seriously?
3. What steps can and should teachers take to assure that they create a classroom free of sexism, while also fostering awareness about sexism? How could this be applied to multiple disciplines?
4. How can we get academicians and students to stop thinking about sexism and misogyny as strictly “women’s studies issues?”
5. How can we get kids to think critically about the purchasing choices they make, which include everything from food to fashion to entertainment?
6. What are the most effective ways of protesting when a company releases sexist products? How can we become empowered consumers?

Assignments

1. Using the 5 questions of media literacy, ask students to watch one TV program, with the accompanying commercial ads, in its entirety, followed by answering each of the five questions as they pertain to that show and the ads affiliated with the show. (Here, you will want to see whether students find a connection between the ads and the theme of the TV show [football game/beer and trucks] as an example of targeted marketing based on assumptions made about the viewing audience.)
2. If the class can agree, for the most part, on a show or artist who is using particularly sexist themes, create a class project of producing a protest document with signatures. Discover the company that sponsors this show or artist and mail copies of your document to it along with the sponsors who finance the show. Explain that this is not censorship; it is your 1st amendment right.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books

The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir (Everyman's Library, New York, 1993) (Originally published in 1953)

Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture, Ariel Levy (Free Press, 2005)

Can't Buy My Love, Jean Kilbourne (Touchstone, 2000)

So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualized Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids, Diane E. Levin and Jean Kilbourne (Random House, Inc. 2008)

The Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help, Jackson Katz (Sourcebooks, Inc. 2006)

Kid Stuff: Marketing Sex and Violence to America's Children, Diane Ravitch and Joseph P. Viteritti (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003)

The Lolita Effect: The Media Sexualization of Young Girls and What We Can Do About It, M. Gigi Durham (Overlook Hardcover, 2008)

Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters: The Frightening New Normalcy of Hating Your Body, Courtney E. Martin (Free Press, 2007)

The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women, Naomi Wolf (Harper Perennial, 2002)

Other MEF Films on Related Issues

Dreamworlds 3: Desire Sex & Power in Music Video (2007)

Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats & Rhymes (2006)

Killing Us Softly 3: Advertising's Image of Women (2000)

Playing Unfair: The Media Image of the Female Athlete (2002)

Recovering Bodies: Overcoming Eating Disorders (1997)

Tough Guise: Violence, Media & the Crisis in Masculinity (1999)

War Zone (1998)

Wrestling With Manhood: Boys, Bullying & Battering (2002)