

A MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION FILM



Killing Us Softly 4

Advertising's
Image
of Women

Featuring **Jean Kilbourne**

“As timely and important as ever.
A must for everyone who cares
about media literacy and gender equity.”

— **Susan Douglas** | Author, *Where The Girls Are:
Growing Up Female With the Mass Media*”

PRAISE FOR *KILLING US SOFTLY 4: ADVERTISING'S IMAGE OF WOMEN*

"When I was a freshman in college, I saw Jean Kilbourne speak in support of her documentary *Killing Us Softly* -- and it quite literally changed my life. It illuminated so much about how the media work and the impact of ads on our collective psyche when it comes to self-esteem, body image, and women. I am not exaggerating when I say that it put me on the path to becoming whatever it is I am today (girl advocate, body image activist, and feminist writer). Well, now an updated version of *Killing Us Softly* is out... and if you have never seen any of Jean's work, now is the time."

- Audrey Brashich | Author of *All Made Up: A Girl's Guide to Seeing Through Celebrity Hype and Celebrating Real Beauty*

"Jean Kilbourne's work is pioneering and crucial to the dialogue of one of the most underexplored, yet most powerful, realms of American culture -- advertising. We owe her a great debt."

- Susan Faludi | Author, *Backlash* and *Stiffed*

"The response from the students was simply amazing. They clapped when the video ended! That is a first in my 37+ years of college teaching. One of my students came up after class and said: 'This video just changed my life.' Jean Kilbourne's impact on our students is simply awesome."

- Tom Proietti | Professor of Communication | Monroe Community College | Rochester, NY

"As timely and important as ever... A must for everyone who cares about media literacy and gender equity."

- Susan Douglas | Author, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up With the Mass Media*

"Sex sells, and this update of author and lecturer Jean Kilbourne's *Killing Us Softly* film series examines how advertising tactics and images in popular culture reinforce unrealistic viewpoints about 'beauty, perception, and identity.' Speaking before an appreciative audience, with accompanying visuals (advertising and print-media stills, television clips, and commercials) smoothly intercutting the lecture, Kilbourne clearly relays statistics, anecdotes, and quotes. Many of the clips show impossibly glamorous, thin women (sometimes digitally enhanced or a composite), and according to Kilbourne, girls and women often try to conform to these images, resulting in widespread eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depression. She believes some contemporary ads border on pornography, and females are objectified, and products (from burritos to beer) are sexualized. Men fare better, but masculine portrayals are often linked with violence. Kilbourne urges viewers to change their attitudes and become 'citizens,' not consumers. Promises to promote discussion in women's studies groups and mass-media classes."

- *Booklist*

"I just saw *Killing Us Softly 3* in my sociology class and was absolutely amazed, inspired and outraged!"

- Leigh Ann | Student

"Jean Kilbourne's work is profoundly important. She's one of those people who makes a difference in how we see the world."

- Arlie Hochschild | Director of the Center for Working Families | University of California, Berkeley

"Hearing Jean Kilbourne is a profound experience. Audiences leave her feeling she teaches them to see themselves and their world differently."

- Carole Beebe Tarantelli | Member of Italian Parliament

"Jean Kilbourne is a prophet calling out in the wilderness for fundamental change in the way we communicate publicly with one another."
- *Adweek*

"Jean Kilbourne's arguments are as focused and unassailable as those of a good prosecutor. Piece by piece she builds a case for an America deeply corrupted by advertisers."
- Mary Pipher | Author, *Reviving Ophelia*

"...ads continue to teach men contempt for women and the feminine side of themselves. All encourage people to think that life's problems are best solved with products... With skill, humor, and acuteness, Kilbourne encourages action against these society-weakening images. Never shrill, her indictment is, if anything, understated."
- Jay Carr | *The Boston Globe*

"Jean Kilbourne is opening the public's eyes to the subtle way ads demean or exploit us. Her writing and research have made her a recognized expert in the field."
- Christine Madsen | *The Christian Science Monitor*

"Advertisements have undergone sociological scrutiny before... but rarely with such humanistic conviction. Jean Kilbourne's gift for metaphor threads her presentation together. As each theme is stated and documented, her audiences are moved to laughter, anger, and, in some cases, no doubt, action."
- James Morrow | *Media and Methods*

FILM SYNOPSIS

In this new, highly anticipated update of her pioneering *Killing Us Softly* series, the first in more than a decade, Jean Kilbourne takes a fresh look at how advertising traffics in distorted and destructive ideals of femininity. The film marshals a range of new print and television advertisements to lay bare a stunning pattern of damaging gender stereotypes -- images and messages that too often reinforce unrealistic, and unhealthy, perceptions of beauty, perfection, and sexuality. By bringing Kilbourne's groundbreaking analysis up to date, *Killing Us Softly 4* stands to challenge a new generation of students to take advertising seriously, and to think critically about popular culture and its relationship to sexism, eating disorders, and gender violence.

CREDITS

Directed By: Sut Jhally
Edited By: Sut Jhally & Andrew Killoy
Media Research: Loretta Alper
Additional Media Research: Scott Morris
Motion Graphics: Andrew Killoy
Additional Graphic Design: Shannon McKenna
Production Director: Jeremy Earp
Camera: David Rabinovitz
Location Sound: Robbie Leppzer
Post-Production Audio: Rikk Desgres (Pinehurst Pictures & Sound)
Additional Cameras: Scott Morris, Andrew Killoy, Jason Young
Technical Production Assistance: David Mello
DVD Authoring: Jason Young
Footage: Jesse Epstein

UNITED STATES • 2010 • 45 mins • Shot on Mini-DV • Color • NTSC • BETA/DVD/DVCAM
Aspect Ratio 4:3 • Stereo • English/English Subtitles

JEAN KILBOURNE QUOTATIONS FROM *KILLING US SOFTLY 4*

“It’s difficult to be healthy in what I call a ‘toxic cultural environment’ – an environment that surrounds us with unhealthy images and constantly sacrifices our health and our sense of well-being for the sake of profit.”

“What does advertising tell us about women? It tells us as it always has that what’s most important is how we look. So the first thing the advertisers do is surround us with the image of ideal female beauty. Women learn from a very early age that we must spend enormous amounts of time, energy, and above all money striving to achieve this look, and feeling ashamed and guilty when we fail. And failure is inevitable because the ideal is based on absolute flawlessness.”

“Men basically don’t live in a world in which their bodies are routinely scrutinized, criticized, and judged; whereas women and girls do. This doesn’t mean that there aren’t stereotypes that harm men; there are plenty of stereotypes that harm men, but they tend to be less personal, less related to the body. Men, in general, don’t experience the emphasis on appearance that women can never escape.”

“On the deepest level, the obsession with thinness is about cutting girls down to size. Now one could say this more vividly than this relatively new size in women’s clothing, size 0 and size 00. Imagine a man going into a clothing store and asking for anything in a size zero, but our girls are taught to aspire to become nothing.”

“At the same time that we allow our children to be sexualized, we refuse to educate them about sex. The United States is the only developed nation in the world that doesn’t teach sex education in the schools. And our children pay a very high price – we have the highest rates of teen pregnancy and the highest rates of sexually transmitted illnesses by far in the developed world.”

“Females have long been categorized as either virgins or whores, of course. What’s new is that girls are supposed to embody both within themselves, and that even very little girls are encouraged to look sexy long before they have any real understanding of what that really means. This creates an impossible double bind. In the same way that the girdles and the corsets of the past have been replaced by an internalized standard even more suffocating, so the sexual repression of the past has been replaced by something in some ways even more demanding and constricting.”

“Most women who have breast implants lose sensation in their breasts, so their breasts become an object of someone else’s pleasure, rather than pleasurable in themselves.”

“Women in business and politics have to walk a very fine line. If they’re considered too sexy or attractive, they’re not taken seriously, but if they’re considered unattractive, they’re mocked and ridiculed.”

BIOGRAPHY

JEAN KILBOURNE is internationally recognized for her groundbreaking work on the image of women in advertising and for her critical studies of alcohol and tobacco advertising. In the late 1960s she began her exploration of the connection between advertising and several public health issues, including violence against women, eating disorders, and addiction, and launched a movement to promote media literacy as a way to prevent these problems. A radical and original idea at the time, this approach is now mainstream and an integral part of most prevention programs. According to Susan Faludi, “Jean Kilbourne’s work is pioneering and crucial to the dialogue of one of the most underexplored, yet most powerful, realms of American culture – advertising. We owe her a great debt.” Mary Pipher has called Kilbourne “our best, most compassionate teacher.”

Academic Credentials and Awards

Kilbourne has a B.A. in English from Wellesley College and a doctorate in education from Boston University. Upon her graduation, she received an award from Wellesley that enabled her to spend three years in Europe, working for the British Broadcasting Corporation in London and for a French film company in Paris. She has been a Senior Scholar at the Wellesley Centers for Women (an honorary position) since 1984.

The recent recipient of one of Boston University’s most prestigious alumni awards, Kilbourne has also received awards from many other organizations, including the Academy for Eating Disorders, the Entertainment Industries Council, the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, and the National Organization for Women. The presenter of an award from the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) said, “No one in the world has done more to improve the image of women in the media than Jean Kilbourne.”

In 2004, she received an honorary doctorate from Westfield State College that proclaimed, “Through research informed by a deep sense of justice, your insights lead us from consumerism to consciousness.” She also received a most unusual tribute in 2004 when an all-female rock band in Canada named itself Kilbourne in her honor.

More recently, she was profiled in *Feminists Who Changed America 1963–1975* and was one of twenty-one journalists, media activists, and educators included in a *Media Heroes* deck of trading cards. Her card said, “Jean Kilbourne pioneered the critical study of images of women in advertising and the use of media literacy for public health and prevention. In 1969, she began lecturing on these topics, and has never stopped, traveling widely and inspiring many educators to follow her example of unflinching critique.”

Media Coverage

Reporters from all over the country rely on Jean Kilbourne as an accurate and interesting source. She has been interviewed by *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *The Boston Globe*, among many other publications. She has been a guest on hundreds of television and radio programs, including *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, *All Things Considered*, *The Today Show*, *20/20*, and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*.

Her films, lectures, and television appearances have been seen by millions of people throughout the world. Kilbourne was named by *The New York Times Magazine* as one of the three most popular speakers on college campuses. She is the creator of the renowned *Killing Us Softly: Advertising’s Image of Women* film series and the author of the award-winning book *Can’t Buy*

My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel and *So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualized Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids* (with Diane E. Levin).

Awards and Honors

Academy for Eating Disorders, Special Recognition Award, 2002
Action Coalition for Media Education Media Activist National Award, 2006
American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, WIN (Women's Image Now) Award, 1995
Association for Women in Psychology, Distinguished Publication Award, 2000 (For *Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think & Feel*)
Boston University School of Education, Ida M. Johnston Award
Educational Foundation of America, 1980 (Grant for a study of gender stereotypes in television commercials)
Entertainment Industries Council, Special Commendation, 1990
Feminists Who Changed America, 1963-1975 (Profiled in the book)
Germaine Lawrence, Inc., Woman of Excellence Award, 2005
Governor's Commission on Sexual and Domestic Violence, Massachusetts, 2003-2005
Kansas City, Kansas, 2004 (Given keys to the city by Mayor Kay Barnes)
MEDA (Multiservice Eating Disorders Association), Annual Award, 2007
Miss Hall's School, Woman of Distinction Award, 2007
Myra Sadker Equity Award, 2005
National Association for Campus Activities, Lecturer of the Year Award (1988 and 1989)
National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Marty Mann Founder's Award, 1998
National Organization for Women, Boston chapter, Woman of the Year, 1982
Non-Smokers' Rights Association, Canada, Award of Merit, 1993
PCAR (Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape) / NSVRC (National Sexual Violence Resource Center), Lifetime Television's Times Square Project Award, 2003
Planned Parenthood of Connecticut, Hilda Crosby Standish Leadership Award, 2005
Reclaim the Media, 2008 (Included as one of twenty-one journalists, media activists, and educators in their "Media Heroes" deck of trading cards)
Stop Teenage Addiction to Tobacco (STAT), Annual Award
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Advisory Council on Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse, 1993-1996
Wellesley Centers for Women, Senior Scholar (2008-present); Visiting Research Scholar, 1984-2008)
Westfield State College, Honorary Doctorate, 2004
Womanspace, Barbara Boggs Sigmund Award, 2008
Women's Action Alliance, Leadership in Action Award, 1995

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

SUT JHALLY

Sut Jhally is Professor of Communication at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and founder and executive director of The Media Education Foundation (MEF). He first gained national recognition for his film *Dreamworlds: Desire, Sex & Power in Music Video* when MTV threatened him with a lawsuit over copyright infringement. The resulting press storm led to numerous requests for the video, and provided the rationale for MEF's founding in 1991. In the time since, Jhally has been the executive producer and/or director of more than 25 films produced and distributed by the Media Education Foundation, including the critically acclaimed *Peace, Propaganda & The Promised Land* and *Hijacking Catastrophe*. He is the author of *The Codes of Advertising* and *The Spectacle of Accumulation: Essays in Cultural Politics*, co-author of *Social Communication in Advertising* and *Enlightened Racism*, and the co-editor of *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America*. A renowned lecturer, he is the recipient of the Distinguished Teaching Award at UMass, and is regarded as one of the world's leading cultural studies scholars in the area of advertising, media, and consumption.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Jean Kilbourne | jeankilbourne@aol.com

To schedule a lecture in the college market, please contact:
Lordly & Dame | lordly@lordly.com | 617-482-3593

The non-profit Media Education Foundation produces and distributes documentary films and other educational resources to inspire critical reflection on the social, political, and cultural impact of American mass media.
www.mediaed.org

FACTS FROM THE FILM

- ❖ Only 8% of an ad's message is received by the conscious mind. The rest is worked and reworked deep within the recesses of the brain.¹
- ❖ 91% of cosmetic procedures are performed on women.²
- ❖ The number of cosmetic surgical procedures performed on people 18 or younger more than tripled in the past decade.³
- ❖ At least one in four girls and one in six boys is sexually abused during their childhood.⁴
- ❖ In 2007, the American Psychological Association released a report concluding that girls exposed to sexualized images from a young age are more prone to three of the most common mental health problems for girls and women—depression, eating disorders, and low self-esteem.⁵
- ❖ More women are injured every year by being beaten by the men they live with than by all rapes, car crashes, and muggings combined.⁶
- ❖ One third of all the women who are murdered in our country are killed by their male partners or their husbands.⁷

¹ Crain, Rance. "Viewpoint: WHO KNOWS WHAT ADS LURK IN THE HEARTS OF CONSUMERS? THE INNER MIND KNOWS." *Advertising Age - Ad & Marketing Industry News* (1997)

² Cosmetic Plastic Surgery Research 2008 The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. Retrieved from <http://www.cosmeticplasticsurgerystatistics.com/statistics.html>.

³ Cosmetic Plastic Surgery Research 2008 The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. Retrieved from <http://www.cosmeticplasticsurgerystatistics.com/statistics.html>.

⁴ Russell, Diana E.H. 1988. The Incidence and Prevalence of Intrafamilial and Extrafamilial Sexual Abuse of Female Children. In *Handbook on Sexual Abuse of Children*, ed., Lenore E.A. Walker. Springer Publishing Co.

⁵ American Psychological Association, Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls. (2010). *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report-full.pdf>.

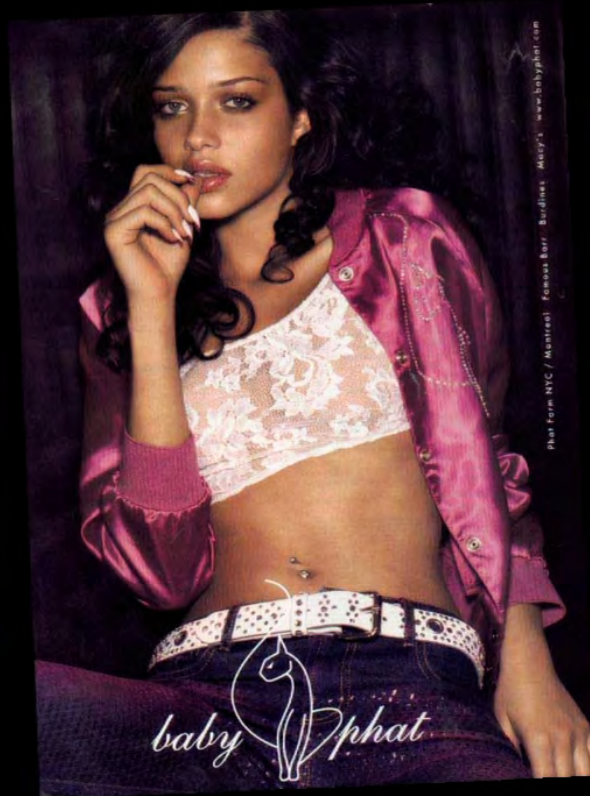
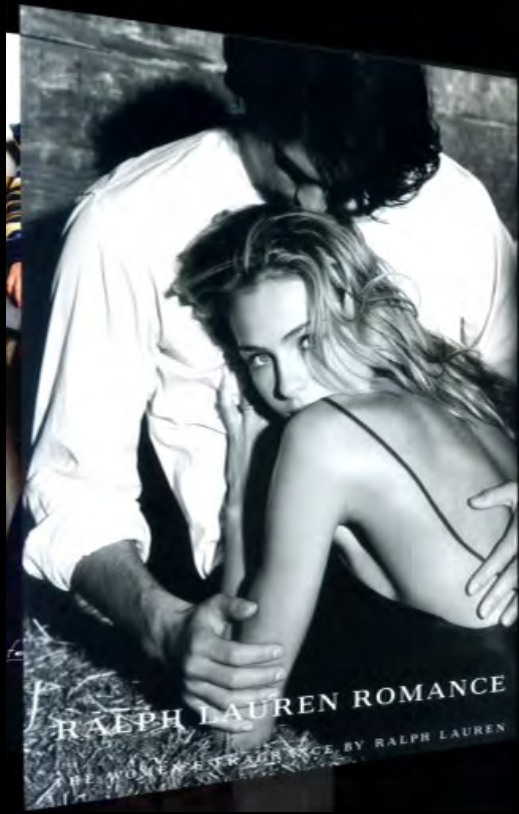
⁶ Stark, Evan and Flitcraft, Anne. *Women At Risk: Domestic Violence and Women's Health*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Pub, 1996.

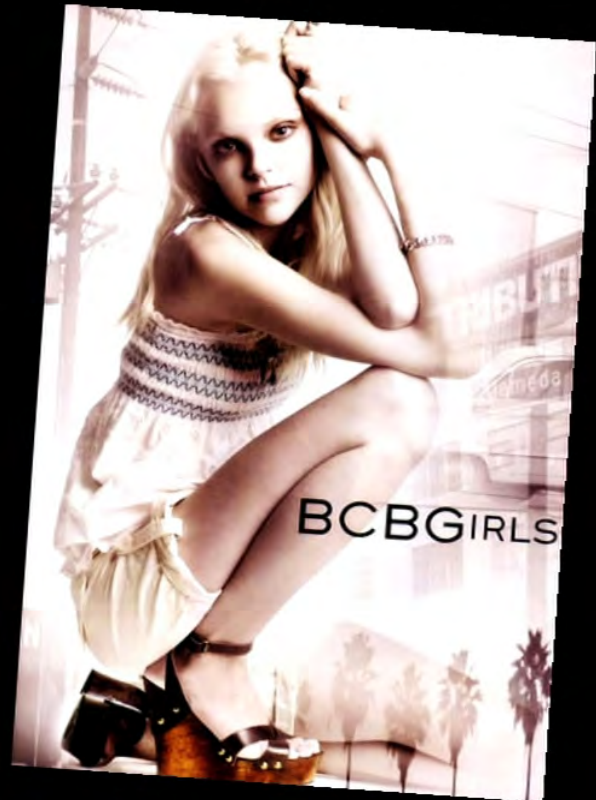
⁷ Bachman, Ronet. "Violence Against Women: A National Crime Victimization Survey Report." *U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics*. U.S. Department of Justice, Jan. 1994.

STILLS FROM *KILLING US SOFTLY 4*

For high res versions, please email alex@mediaed.org.







IT JUST TASTES BETTER 



IT'LL BLOW YOUR MIND AWAY



\$6.25 MEAL

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