

# MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION



Challenging media

# STUDY GUIDE

## KILLING US SOFTLY 3

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ADVERTISING'S IMAGE OF WOMEN | FEATURING JEAN KILBOURNE

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# SYNOPSIS & KEY POINTS

In *Killing Us Softly 3*, the newest version of her groundbreaking video *Killing Us Softly (CDF-1979)*, **Jean Kilbourne** surveys the contemporary advertising landscape to critically examine how, why and to what effect corporations and their advertisers use images of girls and women to sell their products. Deconstructing advertisements with the same kind of care and thought that went into constructing them, Kilbourne pushes the discussion of media and advertising beyond the realm of pure market values on the one hand, and pure aesthetic values on the other. She sets mass media images of femininity against social reality, advertising fantasy against the actual experience of girls and women, and encourages us to consider the relationship between the stories advertising tells about girls and women and the actual lives girls and women lead.

One of Kilbourne's underlying arguments is that advertising, as perhaps the primary storyteller in American culture, has the capacity to both produce and affirm the very fictions about women's desires and identity that advertisers themselves often claim to be innocently tapping into and reflecting back at the public. In keeping with the industry's own self-stated mission to create the markets they pitch to, she argues that there is little that is natural, inevitable or innocent about the stories advertising tells us about women, that cultural standards of "femininity" are less given than made, and that in terms of sheer money, power and cultural presence, the maker that matters most is advertising itself.

By showing how and why advertising takes agency away from women, Kilbourne therefore puts the focus on the agency of advertisers. She uncovers a distinctive and pervasive pattern to the deliberate choices the industry makes, tactical decisions designed to sell their particular brands by selling particular brands of femininity. Her baseline point is that these choices produce casualties in the world beyond advertising – that advertising simultaneously reflects, exacerbates and exploits deep-seated personal and social anxieties about femininity, masculinity and this country's continued ambivalence about shifting gender roles – undermining the way girls and women see themselves, while normalizing the violence done to them by men.

Kilbourne's analysis of advertising fiction and fantasy unfolds against the backdrop of this disturbing reality:

- » Boys and men rape girls and women somewhere in the United States every 2 minutes. <sup>1</sup>
- » More women are injured from being battered by men than by all rapes, muggings and automobile crashes combined. <sup>2</sup>
- » 30% of women murdered in the U.S. are murdered by their husbands, ex-husbands or boyfriends. <sup>3</sup>
- » 81% of ten year olds are afraid of being fat. <sup>4</sup>
- » Forty-five percent of American women are on a diet on any given day. <sup>5</sup>
- » Nearly half of all Americans know someone with an eating disorder. <sup>6</sup>

With an eye on these facts, Kilbourne looks behind the speed, sensation and cool veneer of contemporary advertising and uncovers the following:

- » A mass-media fantasy world populated by carefully crafted and highly restrictive models of femininity.
- » A world in which images of girls and women often project the illusion of female power and agency while at the same time subtly subverting them.

1. U.S. Dept. of Justice, March 1998

2. Stark, E. and Fliterart, A. "Medical Therapy as Repression: The Case of Battered Women," *Health and Medicine*. Summer/Fall (1982), 29-32.

3. Bureau of Justice Statistics National Crime Victimization Survey, August 1995.

4. Statistics: Eating Disorders and Their Precursors" (<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>)

5. *ibid*

6. So. Carolina Dept. of Mental Health Eating Disorder Statistics (<http://www.state.sc.us/dmh/anorexia/statistics.htm>)

# SYNOPSIS & KEY POINTS

- » A widening cultural space in which aesthetic codes and ideals of femininity turn men's violence against women into art, and women against their own bodies.
- » An arena of impossible ideals that derives its power from cyclically feeding and feeding off of reactionary attitudes toward women.
- » A repetitious image system that normalizes sexism and men's violence against women even as, and perhaps because, American women continue to struggle and make progress despite these daily social realities.
- » A place where pervasive images of men's violence against women, along with passive, vulnerable and dehumanized images of women themselves, conspire to reinforce the culture's casual attitudes toward domestic violence and rape.
- » A showcase of so-called "cutting-edge" advertising techniques that continue to thrive on old ideas, including the objectification and dismemberment of women's bodies, the cult of thinness, the co-optation of feminism and women's equality, the infantilization of women, the sexualization of children and teenagers, and the stereotyping of women of color.
- » A world in which advertising image and copy conspire to silence girls and women.

## KEY POINTS

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- » Because of the prevalence of advertising in our culture, the sheer amount of cultural space it occupies, it is crucial to examine and understand the stories advertising tells us about femininity and what it means to be a woman.
- » In addition to products, advertising attempts to sell women the myth that they can, and should, achieve physical perfection to have value in our culture.
- » As advertising pushes its objects, it turns women's bodies into objects, often dismembering them with excessive focus on just one part of the body to sell a product.
- » Advertisers themselves acknowledge that they sell more than products, that the images in advertising are designed to affect the way we see our lives.
- » Men and women inhabit very different worlds. Men's bodies are not routinely scrutinized, criticized and judged in the way that women's bodies are.
- » There is a tremendous amount of contempt for women who don't measure up to the advertisers' ideal of beauty. This is particularly true for older women and women who are considered overweight.
- » Media images of female beauty influence everyone. They influence how women feel about themselves, and they influence how men feel about the real women in their lives.
- » Little girls and teenagers are increasingly sexualized in advertisements. A growing number of ads are reminiscent of child pornography.
- » The negative and distorted image of women in advertising affects not only how men feel about women but also how men feel about anything labeled "feminine" in themselves.
- » In general, human qualities are divided up, polarized, and labeled "masculine" and "feminine," with the "feminine" consistently devalued.
- » Advertising is not solely to blame for rigid gender roles. However, there is no aspect of our culture that is as pervasive and persuasive as advertising.

# SYNOPSIS & KEY POINTS

» Changes in advertising will depend on an aware, active, educated public that thinks of itself primarily as citizens rather than as consumers.

# USING THIS VIDEO IN THE CLASSROOM

- » View the video prior to showing it to your students.
- » Review the study guide and choose which exercises you will use with your students.
- » Use the previewing activities to help your students prepare for the ideas presented by the video.
- » Encourage *active listening*. Because the content of this video is likely to elicit emotional responses from the students, it is important that the students engage with each other in ways that ensure everybody has the opportunity both to speak and to be listened to. It is advised that you set guidelines or norms to ways to “actively listen” in advance of classroom discussions. Check out MEF’s handout, *Techniques for Active Listening*. (<http://www.mediaed.org/Handouts/ActiveListening.pdf>)
- » Have the students keep a journal. It will be an effective place for them to explore their own attitudes and opinions and to record their observations about the media.
- » Review and discuss the handout *How to be a Critical Media Viewer*. (<http://www.mediaed.org/handouts/pdf/CriticalViewing.pdf>)
- » Incorporate activism and advocacy into your media literacy study. They are an important part of empowering students.

# BODY IMAGE & ISSUES IN THE CLASSROOM

## **A NOTE TO EDUCATORS**

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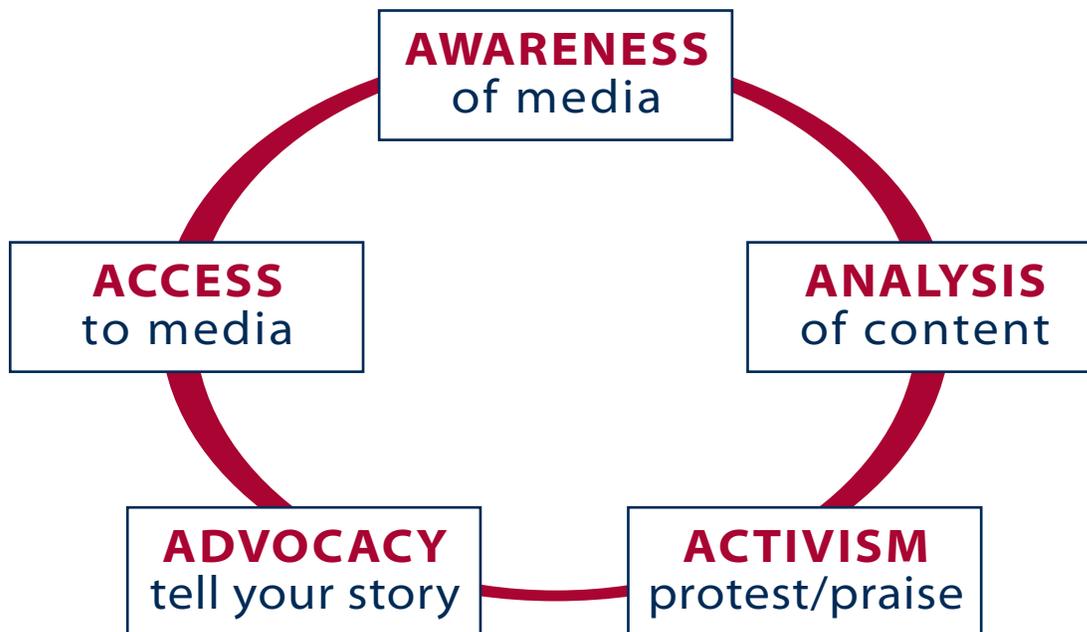
The exercises in this guide, as well as the content, have the potential to open dialogue. Be prepared for the possibility that students might speak candidly about their own feelings about their bodies. The teacher or facilitator, "should listen acutely to students' personal experiences, even if they 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 info about Eating Disorders, see the National Eating Disorders Association (<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>)
- » For info about domestic violence, see the National Coalition of Domestic Violence (<http://www.ncadv.org>)
- » For info about rape and sexual assault, see the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (<http://www.nsvrc.org>)
- » For more resources, see MEF's Resource page (<http://www.mediaed.org>)

\*the National Eating Disorder Association's GO GIRLS! curriculum (<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>)

# THE MEDIA LITERACY CIRCLE OF EMPOWERMENT <sup>7</sup>



## THE MEDIA LITERACY CIRCLE OF EMPOWERMENT EXPLAINED

### AWARENESS

Students learn about the pervasiveness of the media in their lives.

### ANALYSIS

Students discuss the forms and contents of the media's various messages as well as the intent of most media to persuade an audience.

### ACTIVISM

Students develop their own opinions about the negative and positive effects of the media and decide to do something about it – this can be in the form of praise for healthy media, protest of unhealthy media, or development of campaigns to educate others with regard to the media, to change media messages, etc.

### ADVOCACY

Students learn how to work with media and use their own media to develop and publicize messages that are healthy, constructive, and all too often ignored by our society.

### ACCESS

Students gain access to the media – radio, newspaper, internet, television, etc. – to spread their own message. This in turn leads to further awareness of the media and how it works, which leads to a deeper analysis and so forth.

7. Diagram and explanation adopted from the National Eating Disorder Association's Go Girls! curriculum ([www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org))

# PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

The following questions and exercises are designed to encourage your students to think critically about the role advertising plays in their lives, and to explore their attitudes toward strong women. The questions can be used as you prefer: as discussion prompts, or as paper or media journal topics.

1.
  - a. Do you watch television? listen to the radio? read magazines? If so, why, when and how often? Which television shows do you watch? Which radio stations do you listen to? Which magazines do you read?
  - b. How many advertisements do you think you see and hear every day?
  - c. Where else do you see advertisements?
  - d. What makes an advertisement stay in your memory? (Images? Music? Words? Phrases?)
2. What personal care and beauty products do you use on a regular basis?
3. What other products do you use?
4.
  - a. What brand names are you wearing, carrying or using right now?
  - b. What other brand names do you have at home in your closet or room?
5. How do you feel when you use the products that you listed in #2-5? Can you feel this way without these products? If yes, how? If no, why not?
6. Do you think advertising influences you to buy products? If yes, how? If no, explain why you think you're able to resist it.

## EXERCISE 1: FEMINISM SURVEY

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### Learning Objectives:

- » Students will explore and discuss the word "feminism," consider feminist ideas, and think about the impact of feminism on our culture.
- » Students will examine stereotypes of feminism, and evaluate their own attitudes about women's equality.

Make copies of *Handout iB* and handout to your students. This survey, and the discussion questions that follow, are designed to help students think about the immediate resistance and defensiveness that can sometimes greet an analysis like Kilbourne's. They are designed to encourage students to think beyond easy stereotypes that can block deeper analysis, and to take responsibility for their own ideas and views.

**Note:** It might be most effective for students to complete the survey anonymously at the end of a class period. This will allow you to collect the surveys, synthesize the data and share the results with them the next day. You can then use the survey to guide a discussion not only about definitions of feminism and femininity, but about the way that public discourse, especially media discourse, can shape the way we think about reality.

### Survey Discussion questions:

- » What is feminism?
- » Where do stereotypes about feminism come from?
- » How do stereotypes about feminism discredit the ideas behind feminism?
- » In *Tough Guise*, **Jackson Katz** says that people use derisive and personally insulting terms to

# PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

describe strong women because “it has the effect of shutting off thinking about the ideas that feminists represent. If you kill the messenger, you don’t need to face squarely the implications of the message.” Explore Katz’s statement. What do you think he means? In what other social movements are people labeled in ways so as to avoid facing the ideas they represent?

- » What does it mean to be a strong woman? Are strong women always feminists? Explain your reasoning.
- » What terms are often used for women who voice strong opinions? How might these terms serve to keep girls and women from voicing their opinions?

## EXERCISE 2: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A WOMAN?

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### Learning Objectives:

- » Students will develop and refine their ability to write narratives.
- » Students will encounter the diversity of narratives about femininity in our culture.
- » Students will recognize that they have the ability to conceptualize and frame their own stories about femininity and what it means to be a woman in American culture.
- » Students will begin to think about the power stories have to shape our perceptions of reality.

When students are encouraged to look around, and listen, they are likely to find a wide variety of stories told in our culture about what it means to be a woman. They are likely to find stories of limitation, repression and shame, but also stories of liberation, power and strength. Before looking with them at the specific stories advertising tells, this assignment asks that your students answer with their own stories the general question Kilbourne explores in her video: *What does it mean to be a woman?*

The following multi-day exercise encourages your students first to think critically about the different stories told in our culture about women, then to invent their own.

1. Read some examples from stories or novels which answer the question, *What does it mean to be a woman?*
2. Then have students bring in a published story or section of a novel which answers the same question: *What does it mean to be a woman in our culture?* The story need not answer the question directly or completely; rather it should provide a window into the experience of being female, and how female experience is constructed.
3. Have the students share the stories they selected with the class.
4. After discussing the major ideas and themes, have students write a journal entry in response to the following: Based on the stories you heard in class, how would you answer the question, *What does it mean to be a woman in our culture?*
5. **Assignment:** Have students write a story of their own, inspired by the question, *What does it mean to be a woman in our culture?* The story should be short and concise and should make use of figurative language and narrative voice. It doesn’t have to be true to their personal experience (although it can be), but it should be realistic.
6. Have students share their stories with their classmates, either in small groups or as a whole class.
7. Finally, revisit your earlier discussions. Now that they have read the stories of others, and considered the diversity of possibilities, ask them to think again about what it means to be a woman in our culture.

# PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

## EXERCISE 3: EXAMINING ASSUMPTIONS

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### Learning Objective:

Students will explore and examine their assumptions about what it means to be a woman in our culture.

### Assignment:

Esperanza is a woman who grew up in a rural town in South America. She has never seen television, movies or magazines, and she has never been to the United States. She has lived with her family, and her primary duties have been to take care of her young brothers and sisters and to work on her family's coffee plantation. She has been invited to visit her uncle in New York City. You've been selected to write her a letter, explaining what it means to be a woman in the United States.

### Tips:

1. Have students exchange their letters in pairs.
2. Using the letter, have each student make a list of assumptions s/he feels her partner has about what it means to be a woman.
3. Create a master list of these assumptions about what it means to be a woman for the class.
4. Discuss these assumptions and talk about why they matter.
  - » From where do we get these assumptions?
  - » How accurate do you think these assumptions are? Is there anything missing? What else does it, or can it, mean to be a woman?
  - » What is an assumption? How do we know if an assumption is accurate?
  - » What is the relationship between assumptions and stereotypes?

\* Jamaica Kincaid's short story *Girl* works effectively with this discussion.

## EXERCISE 4: BOXED IN BY OUR CULTURE\*

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This exercise can be done as a whole class or in small groups.

### Learning Objective:

Students will identify cultural expectations of girls and women.

1. Have students list as many cultural expectations of women as they can think of – in other words, what the culture tells girls and women about how to live, how to act, what to want, what to be. (*For example, "Be thin," "wear make-up," "be sexy," etc.*)
2. Then have them draw a box around these expectations.
3. Next, ask them to draw arrows that point toward the box, and on each arrow ask them to write a derogatory term they've heard a woman being called when she defies these expectations
4. On the outside of the box, list the things that girls and women do to inspire these terms and labels.

### Discussion:

- » What is your reaction to this activity?
- » Why do you think our culture has these expectations of women?
- » What are the effects of the derogatory terms applied to women?

# PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

» How might derogatory terms limit women?

» In her book *Reviving Ophelia*, **Mary Pipher** writes:

“Girls [struggle] with mixed messages: Be beautiful, but beauty is only skin deep. Be sexy, but not sexual. Be honest, but don’t hurt anyone’s feelings. Be independent, but be nice. Be smart, but not so smart that you threaten the boys... [Girls] have long been evaluated on the basis of appearance and caught in myriad double binds: achieve, but not too much; be polite, but be yourself; be feminine and adult; be aware of our cultural heritage, but don’t comment on the sexism.”

Do you see any of the contradictions Pipher writes about in the cultural expectation box you created? What sense can you make of these contradictions? What effect do these contradictions have on girls and women? What effect do they have on how men and boys view and relate to women and girls?

\*This activity was adapted from The Oakland Men’s Project box exercise. For an explanation of the box exercise see page 87 of *Helping Teens Stop Violence: A Practical Guide for Counselors, Educators, and Parents*, by Allen Creighton with Paul Kivel, Oakland Men's Project. Alameda, CA: Hunter House Publishers, 1992. For more information about the Oakland Men's Project write or call 1203 Preservation Way, Ste. 200, Oakland, CA 94612, tel: 510-835-2433.

# POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following discussion questions are designed, generally, to encourage students to develop their ability to think critically about advertising, its effect on the culture, and its role in a capitalist society. These questions examine the content of the video in overview. More specific discussion questions are also included in the sectional exercises.

1. How many advertisements do you think you see in a day?
2. Where do you see advertisements? (Think of as many places as possible.)
3. What makes an advertisement remain in your memory? (images? words? music? phrases?)
4. What is success? How is success portrayed in advertisements? Who is successful in advertisements? Are there definitions of success other than those offered by advertisements? What are they?
5. What is happiness? How is happiness portrayed in advertisements? Who is happy in advertisements? Are there other definitions of happiness than those offered by advertisements? What are they?
6. What, according to our culture, is the definition of "femininity?" What characteristics are considered "feminine" in our culture? Do other cultures consider different characteristics "feminine?"
7. What, according to our culture, is the definition of "masculinity?" What characteristics are considered "masculine" in our culture? Do other cultures consider different characteristics "masculine?"
8. Can people, whether male or female, have both "feminine" and "masculine" characteristics? Do you see a danger in limiting people to one or the other?
9. Which products are sold using images of women and femininity? Which products are sold using images of men and masculinity? Are these ever switched around? If so, when?
10. What products are sold by people of color? What is the setting in these advertisements?
11. What products are sold using sexuality? Why do you think advertisers use sexuality to sell?
12. Why is sex important in personal relationships? Besides sex, what else is important in a relationship?
13. What would sexual freedom be like? How would it be different than limits on freedom? How would all groups of women and men benefit from sexual freedom?
14. What does it mean to be a consumer?
15. What does it mean to be a conscious consumer?
16. What does it mean to be a citizen?
17. What is the definition of community?
18. How do the messages in advertising counter or undermine social change?
19. What is responsible advertising? If a company is communally responsible, what does that mean?
20. Do advertisers have a responsibility to society? Why? Why not?
21. Do advertisers have a responsibility to children?
22. Who might have a point of view of women in advertising different from Jean Kilbourne's? What might be the reasoning behind this point of view?
23. What are some stories media tell about women? How do they tell them?
24. What are some of the stories media tell us about men? How do they tell them?
25. Where else, besides advertising, do we learn what it means to be a woman in our culture? Which stories about what it means to be a woman are the most powerful in our culture? Why?

## POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 26.** What is the relationship between advertising and capitalism? How does this relationship affect the way people, and human values, are constructed in ads?
- 27.** Jean Kilbourne comments that the impossible, ideal image presented by advertisers “wouldn’t matter so much if it didn’t connect with the core belief of American culture that such transformation is possible; that we can look like this if we just try hard enough, buy the right products. If we’re not beautiful, or thin, or rich, or successful, it’s because we’re just not trying hard enough.” Explore this statement further. In what ways is transformation a central principle of American society? Where in American history and culture does this belief reveal itself? What is the connection between advertising’s impossible image of ideal beauty and the American belief in transformation?
- 28.** In what ways does it benefit women and girls to subscribe to the ideal image of female beauty? When is it self-destructive to do so?
- 29.** Why do some people consider “feminist” a negative label? Why do some women resist being labeled feminists? In what ways does disavowing feminism keep woman from accessing power and autonomy?
- 30.** Jean Kilbourne comments that women of color are disproportionately shown as animalistic and exotic. What effect(s) might this have on girls and women of color? What effect(s) might this have on the way that others view girls and women of color?
- 31.** Do you think the way that women of color are portrayed is changing? Give examples.
- 32.** What are some of the potential effects (physical, emotional, mental) on girls and women of trying to live up to our culture’s ideal image of beauty? What is the relationship between cultural ideals of thinness and the cultural obsession with dieting? with eating disorders?
- 33.** Do you feel that the media reflect or create the ideal image of beauty in our society – or both?
- 34.** Explain why the average model twenty years ago was 5’4” and 140 lbs. and today is 5’11” and 117 lbs. What accounted for this change?
- 35.** How and why do you feel individuals are susceptible to media influence?
- 36.** What is the relationship between dehumanization, objectification and violence?
- 37.** Do you feel that femininity, or what it means to be female, and masculinity, or what it means to be male, are learned or natural? Why?
- 38.** What current images in the popular media work against the image of the passive, vulnerable woman? How are these images different from the story traditionally told by advertisers? What other images can you imagine to portray a diversified understanding of femininity?
- 39.** Do you feel that the culture is opening up, that it has started to embrace more willingly women and girls that go against the traditional feminine type? If so, why do you think this is happening? If not, why not?
- 40.** Do you think that the work of the women’s movement is done, or do you think there is more for it to do?
- 41.** Should men be concerned about women’s freedom, health and equality?
- 42.** What role can girls and women play in diversifying the image of what it means to be a woman in our culture? What role can boys and men play?
- 43.** What can girls and women do to prevent male violence against women? What can boys and men do?
- 44.** What stories do the media tell about men and masculinity? According to the media, what does it mean to be a man?

## POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 45.** Advertisements rarely feature women over the age of 35, and there are many advertisements for beauty products that claim to help women look young, even when they no longer are. What effect do you think this has on the way that women feel about themselves as they age? What effect do you think this has on the value our culture gives to older women? To youth?
- 46.** In what ways do images of thinness and advertisements of food contradict each other in the media? How might their combined effects lead to disordered eating?
- 47.** Do you think there is a link between advertising's co-optation and trivialization of feminism and the resistance of many young women to being identified as feminists? If so, what is it? If not, why not?
- 48.** Advertisements for jeans and perfume tend to be more overtly sexual than those for many other products. Why might this be?
- 49.** Advertisements that objectify men have increased dramatically in recent years. Although the objectification of men doesn't have the same violent consequences as it has for women, there have been recent studies that show the objectification is beginning to take a toll on men's self-esteem. More men are reporting dissatisfaction with their bodies than did a decade ago, and eating disorders among men are on the rise.<sup>8</sup> In what ways, might the objectification of men in advertisements affect the way that men feel about their own bodies?
- 50.** In her closing comments, Jean Kilbourne states that change will depend upon "an aware, active, educated public that thinks of itself primarily as citizens rather than primarily as consumers." What does it mean to think of oneself primarily as a citizen rather than primarily a consumer? Can one be both a citizen and a consumer? How?

8. Olivardia, Roberto, Ph.D., Phillips, Katharine A., M.D., Pope, Jr., Harrison G., M.D., *The Adonis Complex*. The Free Press, New York: 2000.

# SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

## INTRODUCTION

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### Key Points:

- » In 1979, companies spent \$20 billion on advertising. In 1999, companies spent \$180 billion on advertising.
- » The average American views 3000 advertisements in a day.
- » The average American will spend 3 years of his or her life watching television commercials.
- » Advertising is the foundation of the mass media. The primary purpose of the mass media is to sell products.
- » Advertising sells not only products, but also values, images, concepts of love and sexuality, romance, success and normalcy.
- » In recent years, computer retouching has become a primary technique used by advertisers. Before photographs are published, they are digitally retouched to make the models appear perfect. Complexion is cleaned up, eye lines are softened, chins, thighs and stomachs are trimmed, and neck lines are removed. Computers can even create faces and bodies of women who don't exist.

## EXERCISE 1: PERCEPTION VS. REALITY

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### Learning Objectives:

- » Students will challenge their own perceptions of reality.
- » Students will begin to explore the difference between subjective point of view and objective reality – and will be encouraged to consider the potential limits of both.
- » Students will practice “reading between the lines.”

This exercise is designed to help students look beyond the distractions of content and to uncover deeper meanings. Looking at optical illusions can help students understand how something can exist without their being able to see it immediately.

1. Project some examples of double-image illusions (a picture that contains more than one image, such as the famous “Two faces and a vase” illusion) on an overhead. (Some optical illusions are available on-line at [http://www.uic.edu/com/eye/LearningAboutVision/EyeSite/OpticalIllustions/.](http://www.uic.edu/com/eye/LearningAboutVision/EyeSite/OpticalIllustions/))
2. Ask students to describe what they see.
3. Then help them to see what they have not.

### Discussion questions:

- » What does this activity tell you about our perceptions of images?
- » Did both images exist before you could see them?
- » Which image was the real image? The one you saw first or the one that it took some help to see?
- » If you needed someone else to show you the second image, do you think they created the image? Or did it always exist?
- » How might this apply to symbolism and literature? Poetry and subtext? Advertising and underlying messages?
- » Even if an ad does not contain an optical illusion – or an overt so-called “subliminal message” – can

# SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

it contain meanings and ideas that we might not see at first glance? What are some examples of this from the video?

## EXERCISE 2: ADVERTISING ASSUMPTIONS

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### Learning Objectives:

- » Students will identify some of the assumptions media feed and reflect about what it means to be a woman.
- » Students will learn to recognize and question the assumptions advertising thrives on.

1. Make a collage of advertising images aimed at women and teen-aged girls.
2. Create a list entitled “The Assumptions Advertising Makes about Being a Woman.”
3. Compare and contrast this list of assumptions with the list of assumptions you made in Pre-viewing Exercise #3.
4. Why do you think the media define “being a woman” in the way they do? What does Kilbourne say about this?
5. Why is it good for companies if we subscribe to their definition of femininity?
6. Why is it good for companies if we believe that being a woman includes needing products and feeling badly about ourselves?
7. In what ways might it be dangerous for us to believe that “the media know best?”

## OBJECTIFICATION

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“Women are constantly turned into things, into objects. And of course this has very serious consequences. For one thing it creates a climate in which there is widespread violence against women. Now I’m not at all saying that an ad... directly causes violence. It’s not that simple, but it is part of a cultural climate in which women are seen as things, as objects, and certainly turning a human being into a thin is almost always the first step toward justifying violence against that person.” **Jean Kilbourne**

### Key Points:

- » The objectification of women in advertisements is part of a cultural climate in which women are seen as things, as objects.
- » Turning a human being into a thing is almost always the first step toward justifying violence against that person.
- » 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 being an object.

## EXERCISE 1: WOMEN AS OBJECTS

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### Learning Objective:

Students will critically engage Kilbourne’s argument that women’s bodies are turned into objects in order to sell products, and will discuss the potential consequences of objectification in advertising.

### Handout 2A

### Handout 2B

1. Examine **Handout 2A**, the *Francesco Biasia* ad. What do you see?

# SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

- » What is the advertisement trying to sell?
- » Who is the ad targeting?
- » How is this woman's body turned into a thing?
- » Does this woman look like a real person with thoughts, opinions and goals?
- » Can you imagine seeing a man's body used in this way rather than a woman's? Why? Why not?
- » How does this ad make you feel?

**2. Examine Handout 2B**, the *Ford* ad. What do you see?

- » What is the advertisement trying to sell?
- » Who is the ad targeting?
- » In what way is this woman's body turned into a thing?
- » Does this woman look like a real person with thoughts, opinions and goals?
- » Can you imagine seeing a man's body used in this way rather than a woman's? Why? Why not?
- » How does this ad make you feel?

**3. Look through popular magazines** (*Cosmopolitan, Mademoiselle, Elle, Marie Claire, RedBook, Jane, Seventeen, Shape, SELF, Vogue, Vanity Fair, Maxim, etc.*) and see if you can find advertisements that objectify women in order to sell a product.

**4. Discuss:**

- » What effect(s), if any, do you think the objectification of women's bodies has on the culture?
- » Jean Kilbourne states that "turning a human being into a thing is almost always the first step toward justifying violence against that person." What do you think she means by this? Do you agree with her reasoning? Why? Why not?
- » Some people would argue that depicting a woman's body as an object is a form of art. What is your opinion of this point of view? Explain your reasoning.
- » Why do you think that women are objectified more often than men are?
- » Kilbourne explains that the consequences of being objectified are different (and more serious) for women than for men. Do you agree? How is the world different for women than it is for men? How do objectified images of women interact with those in our culture differently from the way images of men do? Why is it important to look at images in the context of the culture?

## EXERCISE 2: WOMAN AS SUBJECT AND OBJECT

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**Learning Objective:**

Students will explore the meanings of and difference between subjectivity and objectivity. They will practice identifying subjectivity and objectivity in visual images.

**1. Discuss:** What is the difference between being a subject and being an object?

**2. Have students find one photograph that portrays a woman as a subject and one photograph that portrays a woman as an object.**

- » What is the difference between how the two women are posed and presented in the two photographs?

# SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

» What makes one woman a subject and the other an object?

**3.** Look through a fashion magazine. Count and record the number of women that you feel are portrayed as objects and the number of women portrayed as subjects.

» What is your reaction to your findings? What sense do you make of them?

## **DISMEMBERMENT**

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“Women’s bodies continue to be dismembered in advertising. Over and over again just one part of the body is used to sell products, which is, of course, the most dehumanizing thing you can do to someone. Not only is she a thing, but just one part of that thing is focused on.” **Jean Kilbourne**

## **EXERCISE 1: THE DISMEMBERING OF WOMEN**

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### **Learning Objective:**

Students will recognize how women’s bodies are dismembered in advertising, and will explore the potential effects of these images on real men and women.

### **Handout 3A**

### **Handout 3B**

**1.** Look at **Handout 3A**, the *Bacardi* ad.

- » What feelings are the advertisers trying to create with this ad? Were they effective?
- » Why do you think the advertisers chose to focus only on this woman’s stomach?
- » What is this ad saying, implying or promising?

**2.** Look at **Handout 3B**, the *Aubade* ad.

- » What feelings are the advertisers trying to create with this ad? Were they effective?
- » Why do you the advertisers choose to focus only on this woman’s breasts?
- » What is this ad saying, implying or promising?

**3.** Why do you think advertisers might choose to focus on only one body part?

**4.** What is your reaction to advertisers using dismemberment as an advertising technique?

**5.** What are some consequences of this technique? On our perceptions? Our attitudes?

Currently, legs seem to be a particularly popular body part on which to focus.

### **Handout 3C**

### **Handout 3D**

### **Handout 3E**

### **Handout 3F**

**6.** Why do you think advertisers might choose to draw attention to legs?

**7.** When advertisers choose to focus explicitly on legs, do they present a diversity of body types? Why do you think they portray legs the way they do?

**8.** What are some possible effects on young girls and women of constantly seeing images like these? What about effects on young boys and men?

# SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

**9. Sut Jhally** says in *Dreamworlds 2*, an analysis of the portrayal of women in music video, that women in rock videos are “merely outlines. Just Shapes. Nothing inside matters... They are just legs in high heels.” What do you think he means when he says this? How does this connect with the constant focus on ‘legs in high heels’ in advertising?

## **EXERCISE 2: THE DISMEMBERING OF WOMEN (CONTINUED)**

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1. Look through popular fashion magazines and find images that dismember women, that focus on only one body part.

2. Create a woman made of the different body parts you’ve found.

**Journal Entry:** *Look at the collage of images you have just created.*

- » How do you feel when you look at it?
- » Were you able to create a sense of the woman’s subjectivity, her humanity? Why or why not?
- » What are your thoughts on dismembering women in advertising?

## **THE OBSESSION WITH THINNESS**

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“...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*

### **Key Points:**

- » As girls reach adolescence, they get the message that they should not be too powerful, should not take up too much space. They are told constantly that they should be less than what they are.
- » At least 1 in 5 young women in America today has an eating disorder.
- » One recent study of fourth grade girls found that 80% of them were on diets.
- » Twenty years ago, the average model weighed 8% less than the average woman. Today, the average model weighs 23% less than the average woman.
- » Only 5% of women have the body type (tall, genetically thin, broad-shouldered, narrow-hipped, long-legged and usually small-breasted) seen in almost all advertising. (When the models have large breasts, they’ve almost always had breast implants.)
- » The obsession with thinness is used to sell cigarettes.
- » 80% of American women are dissatisfied with their appearance.<sup>9</sup>
- » 45% of American women are on a diet on any given day.<sup>10</sup>
- » Nearly half all Americans know someone with an eating disorder.<sup>11</sup>

See **Body Image & Issues in the Classroom**

9. "Statistics: Eating Disorders and their Precursors" (<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>)

10. *ibid*

11. So. Carolina Dept. of Mental Health Eating Disorder Statistics (<http://www.state.sc.us/dmh/anorexia/statistics.htm>)

# SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

## **EXERCISE 1: ADVERTISING & BODY IMAGE**

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### **Learning Objective:**

Students will recognize that the standard of thinness presented by the media is unrealistic and potentially harmful.

“Encouraging the media to present more diverse and real images of people with positive messages about health and self-esteem may not eliminate eating disorders entirely, but it will help reduce the pressures many people feel to make their bodies conform to one ideal, and in the process, reduce feelings of body dissatisfaction and ultimately decrease the potential for eating disorders.” **NEDA website** (<http://nationaleatingdisorders.org>)

Watch an hour of prime-time television and record what commercials, music videos, or shows come on. 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.) Then go to a public place (a mall, a grocery store, a coffee shop, etc.) and count the number of thin and non-thin women you see.

1. How do the numbers compare? Compare and contrast the world on television versus the world you live in every day. Do you see evidence that the world on television influences the way people act in their own lives? Explain.
2. What did you notice about the differences between how thin women were portrayed on television versus the way non-thin women were portrayed? Who was more likeable – the thin women or the non-thin women? What effect might this have on the way that young girls and women see themselves and others? The way that young boys and men see girls and women?
3. Eating disorder specialists cite the influence of the media as one influential factor in the development of eating disorders in young women. In what ways do you think the media supports eating-disordered attitudes and behaviors?

## **EXERCISE 2: BODY IMAGE (CONTINUED)**

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In this exercise, students will examine the August 2001 cover of *SELF Magazine*. Keep in mind that *SELF* describes itself as a health and fitness magazine.

### **Handout 4A**

1. Read the headlines on the cover of *SELF*. What is the focus of each headline?
2. After simply glancing at the cover of this magazine, how do you think *SELF* defines health? fitness?
3. How do you define health? fitness?
4. “Health” and “Fitness” magazines often emphasize the correlation between weight loss and health. When are weight loss and health at odds with one another?

## **EXERCISE 3: BODY IMAGE (CONTINUED)**

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Look through a “health and fitness magazine” (*SELF, Shape, Fitness, etc.*). Pay attention to any articles that tell the truth about dieting (that it can be harmful for you), and to any advertisements that sell diet products or use the desirability for thinness to sell a product. Do you notice any contradictions?

» Which do you think is more appealing – an advertisement for a weight-loss product or an article that explains the dangers of dieting? Why?

# SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

- » Which message do you think is more powerful – the message that dieting can be unhealthy or the message that you look more attractive and desirable when you are thin? Why?
- » What effect do you think these messages about weight and health have on the psyches of young girls and women? How might they affect how boys and men see women?

## **EXERCISE 4: BODY IMAGE (CONTINUED)**

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### **Handout 4B**

Examine **Handout 4B**, an advertisement that ran in the August 2001 issue of *SELF Magazine*.

1. What is the ad trying to sell?
2. Who is the ad targeting?
3. What feelings is the ad trying to create? Do you feel it is effective? Why or why not?
4. What is the ad saying, implying or promising?
5. How is this ad using the desire for thinness to sell its product? How do you feel about the way they do this?

For more activities, see the *Slim Hopes* teacher's guide.

For more information about this topic, see *Slim Hopes*, *Recovering Bodies* and *Reviving Ophelia*.

## **FOOD & ADVERTISING**

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"[In American culture] emotional nourishment is linked with physical nourishment. Many of our words for those we love are food words, such as sweetie, sugar and honey."<sup>12</sup> The association between food and intimacy can be dangerous for women who struggle with binge eating disorders and bulimia, since bingeing often represents an attempt to satisfy an emotional hunger rather than a physical one. Advertisements that support emotional eating and imply that "you can never have too much" encourage, or at least normalize, the attitudes that lead to bingeing. There are many other ways that advertising supports eating-disordered attitudes. Women are sent the message that they shouldn't eat too much, that it is appropriate to eat only a cereal bar for breakfast, and that they gain power and respect by controlling their bodies. When advertising for food is examined in conjunction with the prevalence of extremely thin models, we discover a recipe for disordered attitudes toward eating.

### **Key Points:**

- » The American food industry spends \$36 billion on advertising each year.
- » Women's magazines are full of ads for rich foods and recipes.
- » Eating has become a moral issue. Words such as "guilt" and "sin" are often used to sell food.
- » Americans spend more than \$36 billion dollars on dieting and diet-related products each year.
- » 95% of all dieters regain the weight they lost, and more, within five years.
- » Articles about the dangers of diet products are often contradicted by advertisements for diet products within the same magazine.
- » Sex is frequently used to sell food. Many ads eroticize food and normalize bingeing. These ideas support dangerous eating-disordered behaviors.

12. Pipher, Mary. *Reviving Ophelia*. Ballantine Books: New York, 1994.

# SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

## EXERCISE 1: ADVERTISING & FOOD

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### Learning Objectives:

- » Students will become aware of the messages advertisements send them about food and eating. They will begin to evaluate these messages with regard to physical, mental and emotional health.
- » Students will consider the links between the advertising of food and disordered eating attitudes.

### Handout 5A

### Handout 5B

1. Examine **Handout 5A**, the advertisement for *SnackWell's*, which ran in a recent issue of *Good Housekeeping*.

- » Who is this ad targeting?
- » What feelings is it trying to create? Is it effective?
- » What is the ad saying, implying or promising?
- » How does this ad link sex and food?
- » How does this ad support an eating disordered attitude?

2. Examine **Handout 5B**, the advertisement for *Lean Cuisine*.

- » Who is this ad targeting?
- » What feelings is it trying to create? Is it effective?
- » What is the ad saying, implying, or promising?
- » What message does this ad send about women and eating?
- » How does this ad support an eating disordered attitude?

3. Look through magazines and find advertisements for food. Observe them carefully. What do you notice? What messages are they sending? How do these messages interact with the messages about weight and food that are so pervasive in our culture?

For more information on this topic, see *Slim Hopes*, *Recovering Bodies* and *Reviving Ophelia*.

## WOMAN VS. WOMAN

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Girls and women are often depicted in the mass media as being in competition with each other for men. This phenomenon can have consequences. If these media depictions are absorbed, they can create suspicion between women, make it difficult for them to form solid friendships and bonds, and undermine trust. It can also isolate girls and women from one another and keep them from finding the strength (emotional and political) found in numbers to question and challenge the status quo.

### Learning Objective:

Students will think critically about images of women in competition with one another. They will discuss the assumptions about women's lives and power that this phenomenon involves, the potential consequences, and how these ideas play out in their own lives.

# SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

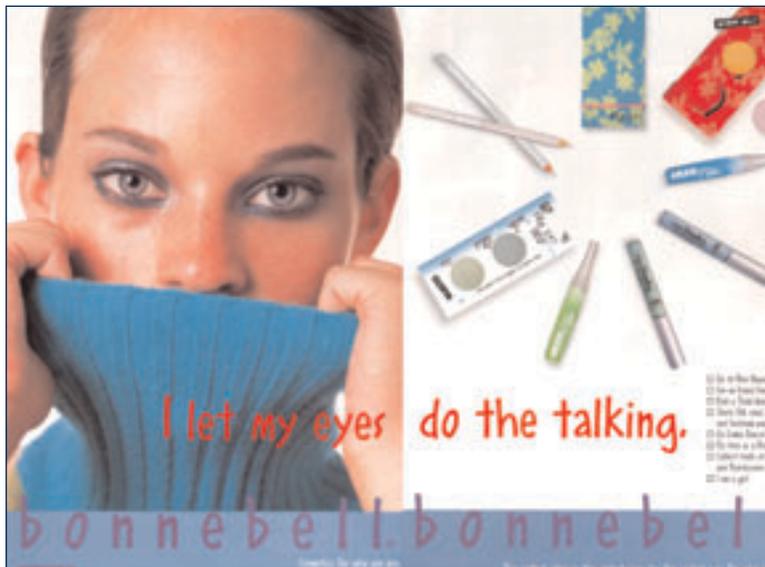
## EXERCISE 1: THE ISOLATION OF WOMEN

### Handout 6A

### Handout 6B

1. Examine **Handout 6A**, the *Valentino* advertisement.
  - » Who is the ad targeting?
  - » What feeling is the ad trying to create? Is it effective?
  - » What message is the ad sending about women? about men?
  - » What story does this ad tell about how women relate to one another?
2. Examine **Handout 6B**, a fashion layout which ran in *Harper's Bazaar*.
  - » What feeling is this image trying to create? Is it effective?
  - » What message is the ad sending about women? about men?
  - » What story does this ad tell about how women relate to one another?
3. What effects might the story told by these images have on the young women who see these images and others like them? What effects might this story have on young men?
4. What effect might this story have on feminism and feminist ideas?
5. Do you see this story in places other than in advertising? If so, where?

## SILENCING: DOES HER VOICE MATTER?



"I have lots of opinions about the ideas we talk about in class, but I don't want to say them out loud because I don't want the boys to think I'm a bitch."

**17-year-old young woman (to her teacher)**

### Key Points:

- » There are many images in advertising that silence women – images that show women with their hands over their mouths and other visuals, as well as copy, that strip women of their voices.
- » The body language of young women and girls in advertising is usually passive and vulnerable. Conversely, the body language of men and boys is usually powerful, active and aggressive.

# SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

## EXERCISE 1: WOMEN'S VOICES

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### Learning Objective:

Students will think critically about images that suggest the silencing of women, and consider these images in the context of cultural pressures on women to repress their opinions.

1. Look through magazines and cut out all the images that you feel portray women without voices. Look for images with women with their hands over their mouths, with their heads in bubbles, paper bags, or removed. Pay attention, too, to copy that suggests that women shouldn't talk, such as, "Let your fingers do the talking," "Barely there," and "Just Smiling the Bothers Away."

2. Create a collage of the images that you cut out.

3. Write a journal entry exploring the following questions:

- » When you look at the collage, what do you see?
- » What does it make you think about? How does it make you feel?

4. In her book, *The Story of an African Farm*, **Olive Schreiner** writes, "The world tells us what we [girls] are to be and shapes us by the ends it sets before us. To men it says, work. To us, it says, seem. The less a woman has in her head the lighter she is for carrying." Similarly, **Simone de Beauvoir** writes, "Girls stop being and start seeming." What is your response to the experiences and observations of these women? Do you agree that there are pressures in our culture that tell girls to be quiet? Do you think there is a connection between images like the ones in your collage and the silencing that some women experience? Explain your reasoning.

5. After watching *Killing Us Softly 3* with his English class, a 17-year-old young man said, "I see the images of women with their hands over their mouths a lot, but I don't think the advertisers are intending to silence them." A classmate of his responded, "It doesn't matter what the advertisers intentions are. The cumulative effect of the images is that girls get the idea that they're supposed to be quiet and look pretty." How do you respond to this exchange? Do you think the advertisers intentions are important? Why? Why not?

## THE TRIVIALIZATION OF POWER

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### Key Points:

- » When girls are shown with power in advertising, it is almost always a very masculine definition of power.
- » Often the power that women are offered in advertising is silly and trivial.
- » Women are often infantilized in advertisements, producing and reinforcing the sense that they should not grow up, resist becoming a mature sexual being, and remain little girls.

## EXERCISE 1: ADVERTISING & WOMEN'S POWER

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### Learning Objective:

Students will learn to recognize the ways that advertisements subtly trivialize women's power. They will discuss the connection between these images and the resistance to feminism.

### Handout 8A

### Handout 8B

1. Examine **Handout 8A**, the ad for V05.

## SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

- » Who is the ad targeting?
- » How is the ad using language and imagery associated with power to sell their product?
- » Do you think the language and imagery in this ad trivialize power? If so, how? If not, why not?
- » Imagine this advertisement with a man rather than a woman. How might his body language and facial expression look different from that of the woman in this ad?
- » Would the message be the same if the ad used a man rather than a woman? If yes, how? If not, how would it be different? What does this tell you about our societal constructions of gender?

2. Examine **Handout 8B**, the ad for *Nokia*, which ran in a popular women's fashion magazine.

- » Who is the ad targeting?
- » How is the ad using language associated with power to sell its product? (The copy reads: *You have the power to change things. Well, at least the power to change the color of your phone.*)
- » Do you feel this language trivializes power? If so, how? If not, why not?
- » Would the message of this ad be the same if it ran in a popular men's magazine? If yes, how? If not, how would it be different? What does this tell you about the construction of gender in American culture?

3. Do you feel there is a link between images like these and the negative connotations sometimes associated with feminism? Explain.

### THE SEXUALIZATION OF TEENAGERS



In recent years, mainstream media have increasingly traded in the sexualization of 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 repeatedly in media – whether in dress, style, attitude or behavior – they are in effect emulating a carefully crafted fiction that is expressly designed by marketers to be consumed as an object.

#### **Learning Objective:**

Students will explore the sexualization of children and teenagers in mass media and consider the implications.

**Britney Spears**, age 19, in a *Harper's Bazaar* fashion layout

# SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

## **EXERCISE 1: THE SELLING OF KIDS & SEX**

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In this activity, students will examine three advertisements that ran in the September 2001 issue of *Seventeen Magazine*.

### **Handout 9A**

### **Handout 9B**

### **Handout 9C**

1. Look at each ad individually, and answer the following questions:

- » Who is the ad trying to target?
- » What is the ad trying to sell?
- » What feeling is the ad trying to create? Do you feel it works?
- » What is the ad saying, implying or promising?
- » How old do you think the model in this advertisement is?

### **Then answer:**

1. What message(s) do images like these send to young girls about sex?
2. What message(s) do images like these send to young boys about sex?
3. Images like these, with models of close to the same age, also appear in popular men's magazines. The audience of these magazines ranges from age 14-40+. What do images like these suggest to older men about teenage girls? In what ways do you feel this might be dangerous?
4. How might it be dangerous for young girls to dress and act like the models and celebrities in magazines?
5. 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?
6. What connections, if any, do you see between how young models are portrayed in fashion magazines and child pornography?

For more information about this topic see the section "Sexual Pressures" in M.E.F.'s *Reviving Ophelia*.

## **AGEISM IN ADVERTISING: "KEEP YOUNG & BEAUTIFUL IF YOU WANT TO BE LOVED."**

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Advertisements rarely feature women over the age of 35, and there are many advertisements for beauty products that claim to help women continue to look young, even when they no longer are.

### **Learning Objectives:**

- » Students will become aware of the messages that advertising sends about age and beauty.
- » They will consider alternative points of view of age and evaluate the messages sent by the media.

## **EXERCISE 1**

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### **Handout 10A**

### **Handout 10B**

### **Handout 10C**

Examine the hand-outs, advertisements for products that fight the signs of aging.

1. Who are these ads targeting?

# SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

2. What feeling(s) are they trying to create?
3. What are they saying, implying or promising?
4. What point of view do these ads have of age and beauty?
5. What other points of view exist about age and beauty?
6. Do you think advertising has helped create the cultural attitude that youth and beauty are synonymous? Or do you think it reflects this cultural attitude? If it has helped to create the attitude, what do you think makes people susceptible to the influence of the media?
7. What effect do you think this has on the way that women feel about themselves as they age? What effect do you think this has on the way our culture views older women?

## **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

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- » A woman is raped somewhere in America every 2 minutes. (*U.S. Dept. of Justice, March 1998*)
- » 1 in 4 women will be raped in her lifetime. (*U.S. Dept. of Justice, March 1998*)
- » 32,260 women were murdered by an intimate from 1976-1996. (*U.S. Dept. of Justice, March 1998*)
- » 66-80% of victims know their offender. (*FBI, 1990*)
- » More than 50% of all women will experience violence from intimate partners. (*National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1992*)
- » Wife beating results in more injuries requiring medical treatment than rape, auto accidents, and muggings combined. (*Stark, E. and Fliterart, A. "Medical Therapy as Repression: The Case of Battered Women," Health and Medicine. Summer/Fall (1982) 29-32*)
- » 30% of women murdered in the U.S. are murdered by their husbands, ex-husbands or boyfriends. (*Bureau of Justice Statistics National Crime Victimization Survey, August 1995*)

Despite the alarming rates of men's violence against women in the United States, women and girls are frequently depicted in the media as victims of violence. Often, the violence is sexualized. Scenes of violent assaults against women are used continually in horror films for entertainment purposes, and some companies use violent images in their advertising campaigns for shock and aesthetic value to help sell their products. Because we see these images regularly and without serious commentary, they become normal. The activities in this section will help make students aware of how media trivialize men's violence against women.

### **Key Points:**

- » Increasingly, more advertisements show women as victims of sexual harassment and violence.
- » Violence against women is normalized by advertisements.
- » Women live in a world defined by the threat of sexual violence and intimidation. The portrayal of women in advertising supports, rather than objects to, these threats.
- » Masculinity in advertising is often linked with violence, brutality and ruthlessness. Men are constantly portrayed as the perpetrators of violence.
- » Violence, hostility and dominance are often presented as erotic, attractive and appealing in advertising.

See **Body Image & Issues in the Classroom**

# SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

## Learning Objective:

Students will become aware of images in advertising that depict violence against women. They will explore the consequences of such images.

## EXERCISE 1: THE BRUISED LOOK

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In recent years, it has become fashionable for advertisers to make up models in a way that they resemble women who have been battered.

### Handout 11A

### Handout 11B

### Handout 11C

1. For each of the hand-outs, answer the following questions:
  - » What is the advertisement trying to sell?
  - » What feelings is it trying to create? Is it effective?
  - » What adjectives would you use to describe the woman in the advertisement?
  - » Does this woman look capable of defending herself?
  - » Can you imagine seeing a man in an advertisement in a similar position with a similar expression? Why? Why not?
2. Look through some popular fashion magazines, and find images similar to those on the hand-outs.
  - » Are the images prevalent in the magazines?
  - » Do they show up more often in some magazines than others? Which magazines? What do these magazines have in common? What do you think the reason for this might be?
  - » What effects might images like these have on women and girls who see them?
  - » Battering is the single greatest cause of injury to women in America. One third of women who are murdered in our country are killed by their husbands or partners. And, according to statistics, 1 in 4 women will be raped in her lifetime. When you look at the images above within the context of this rate of men's violence against women in our culture, how do you respond to those images? Do you think that advertisers have a responsibility to the society to consider the attitudes that their images support?
  - » Why do you feel would advertisers use such images in the first place?
  - » Regardless of why they use them, what overall effect might such images have – beyond encouraging men to commit specific acts of violence?

# SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

## EXERCISE 2: BONDAGE



“When bondage is used to sell perfume in *The New Yorker* and watches on a city bus, we can say that pornography has become mainstream.”

**Jean Kilbourne**

### Handout 11D

### Handout 11E

1. Examine **Handout 11D**, the *Diamond.com* ad.

- » What is the advertisement trying to sell?
- » What feelings is it trying to create? Is it effective?
- » What audience is the ad targeting?
- » What adjectives would you use to describe the woman in the ad? Does she look like a person with thoughts, feelings and opinions?
- » Does the woman in the ad look like she is capable of defending herself?
- » Can you imagine a man appearing in an ad in a similar position? Why? Why not? What does this tell you about how gender is constructed and viewed in our culture?

2. Examine **Handout 11E**, the *Lexus* ad.

- » What is the advertisement trying to sell?
- » What feelings is it trying to create? Is it effective?
- » What audience is the ad targeting?
- » What adjectives would you use to describe the woman in the ad? Does she look like a person with thoughts, feelings and opinions?
- » Does the woman in the ad look like she is capable of defending herself?
- » The copy for this ad reads, “*Are we the cutting-edge of avant garde?...Well, no...It’s sufficiently radical.*” The copy is about the car, but it is also associated with this image. How do you respond to Lexus’ association between this image and the terms “avant garde” and “radical”? What are they implying? Do you think this image is either “avant garde” or “radical”? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- » Can you imagine a man appearing in an ad in a similar position? Why? Why not? What does this tell you about the gender construction in our culture?

3. Why do you think advertisers use bondage to sell products?

4. Do you think it’s an effective technique? Why? Why not?

# SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

5. What is your response to the use of bondage in advertising?
6. When you think of this technique within the cultural context of men's violence against women, how do you respond to it?

## EXERCISE 3: NORMALIZING ROUGH TREATMENT

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### Handout 11 F

### Handout 11G

1. Examine **Handout 11F**, an advertisement for *Emanuel Ungaro* which ran in the September 2001 issue of *Elle*.
  - » What adjectives would you use to describe the woman in this ad?
  - » What is implied or suggested by this ad?
  - » What are possible scenarios that led to this woman lying on the floor in this way?
  - » Is there anything provocative about the ad? If yes, what?
  - » In what ways does this image link violence and sex? How might this be dangerous?
  - » Does this ad shock you? Why or why not?
2. Examine **Handout 11G**, an advertisement for *Valentino* which ran in the September 2001 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*.
  - » What adjectives would you use to describe the woman in this ad?
  - » What adjectives would you use to describe the man in this ad?
  - » What is implied or suggested by this ad?
  - » What story does this ad tell about masculinity? About femininity? How might these stories be dangerous?
  - » How do you respond to this advertisement, when you think about it in the context of our culture?
  - » How do such ads relate to Kilbourne's point about advertising "normalizing" men's violence against women?

## EXERCISE 4: FINDING EXAMPLES

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Look through fashion magazines and look for other ways that advertisers depict violence against women, either explicitly or indirectly. Discuss your findings.

- » How are the techniques different from one another? How are they similar?
- » Are there some techniques that are more harmful than others? Explain your reasoning.
- » Apart from inspiring imitation of violent acts in boys and men, what do you think is the overall, cumulative effect of this kind of ad technique?

## EXERCISE 5: EXPLORING LITERATURE ON VIOLENCE

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### Read the following:

- » **Sandra Cisneros'** short story *Woman Hollering Creek*
- » "What is Dating Violence?" (<http://wvdhr.org/bph.trust/whatis.htm>)
- » "Domestic Violence and Abuse: Signs of Abusive Relationships" ([http://www.helpguide.org/mental/domestic\\_violence\\_abuse\\_types\\_signs\\_causes\\_effects.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/domestic_violence_abuse_types_signs_causes_effects.htm))

# SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

## Discuss:

- » What parallels can you make between the story and the information on the website?
- » Cleofilas watches a lot of telenovellas. In what ways is she influenced by the media? In what ways do the telenovellas make it difficult for Cleofilas to leave the abusive relationship?
- » Do you think that the media in our culture contribute to the difficulty women often have in leaving abusive relationships? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?

## IS IT INTENTIONAL?

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One of the frequent responses to *Killing Us Softly 3* is “Jean Kilbourne is just making this up. She’s reading into the advertisements too much. The advertisers don’t intend to send harmful messages to their viewers.” The following exercise exposes students to more information to help them think more critically about advertisers’ intentions.

This exercise asks students to examine some advertisements that ran in *Advertising Age*, a marketing publication directed toward advertisers. This publication is not intended for the general public, and the ads are very direct.

### Handout 12A

### Handout 12B

### Handout 12C

1. Examine **Handout 12A**, the ad for *HI Frequency Marketing*, an advertising agency.

- » Who is the ad targeting?
- » What is it saying or implying?
- » How does the imagery work with the ad’s message?
- » What is your response to the ad’s message and imagery?
- » In what way does the ad use violence to sell its message?
- » According to this ad, how does *HI Frequency Marketing* feel about children and teenagers? What do they think is valuable about them?
- » What does this ad tell you about the intentions of advertisers?

2. Examine **Handout 12B**, the ad for *YM*. The ad was too large to scan in entirety. The large print reads, “*In a world gone girl, YM is your magazine.*”

- » Who is the ad targeting?
- » What is the large print saying or implying?
- » What is the copy saying or implying?
- » How does this ad use the concept of “girl power” to sell their magazine to advertisers. Do you think they trivialize power? Why? Why not?
- » What is your response to the ad’s message?
- » According to this advertisement, how does *YM* feel about girls? What do they think is valuable about them?
- » What does this ad tell you about the intentions of advertisers?

3. Examine **Handout 12C**, the ad for *Bauer Publishing*.

## SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

- » Who is the ad targeting?
- » What is the ad saying or implying?
- » What is your response to the ad's message?
- » According to this advertisement, how does *Bauer Publishing* feel about girls? What do they think is valuable about them?
- » What does this ad tell you about the intentions of advertisers?

**4.** After looking at some advertisements from *Advertising Age*, what do you think advertisers intentions are? Why do you think they use ads with thin women, ads that suggest (or directly show) violence against women, ads that objectify women?

# WRITING EXERCISES

Although the exercises in this section are intended as writing exercises, many can be adapted into classroom activities. Likewise, the classroom exercises and activism/advocacy activities can also be adapted into writing exercises.

1. Below are three different points of view of scars.

- » “Scars remind us that our past is real.” – Duena Alfonsa, *All the Pretty Horses* by **Cormac McCarthy**
- » “We are our injuries as much as we are our successes.” – Adah, *The Poisonwood Bible* by **Barbara Kingsolver**
- » “A scar is no one’s idea of attractive.” – *Neosporin* advertisement

Create a trilogy between the two fictional characters and the Marketing Director of *Neosporin*. Have the characters discuss the role that scars play in our culture. Be creative.

2. Ask students to write about a personal experience - involving themselves or someone they know - in which there was pressure to conform to a rigid gender stereotype. Encourage them to look critically at this experience, and to widen their discussion by connecting this personal experience to some of the larger issues presented in the video.

3. Find an advertisement that features a woman. Create a story written from her point of view. Imagine what her story is. Imagine what she has to say, what she wants to say. Be creative and thoughtful!

4.

- » Read “Lucielia Louise Turner,” a chapter in **Gloria Naylor’s** *The Women of Brewster Place*. Write a character analysis of Lucielia.
- » Re-write the chapter from Eugene’s point of view. Imagine what his story is and what his thoughts are.
- » Read “Eugene,” a chapter in **Gloria Naylor’s** *The Men of Brewster Place*.

**(Note to Educator:** *These readings and writing exercises set up a productive discussion about gender issues, point of view and sexuality.*)

5.

- » Read **Joyce Carol Oates’** short story *Where are you going? Where have you been?*
- » Write a paper that explores the connection between the theme of this story and images in advertising that sexualize teenagers.

6.

- » **Watch Disney’s** *Cinderella*. Pay close attention to the portrayal of gender roles.
- » Watch *Ever After*. Pay close attention to the portrayal of gender roles.
- » Write a paper exploring the way that *Ever After* challenges the gender roles embedded in the original *Cinderella*.

7. Watch one of the following movies (*Thelma and Louise*, *Notting Hill*, *Ever After*, *Miss Congeniality*, or *Boys Don’t Cry*). Write a movie review for an alternative publication, such as *Utne Reader*, which has a readership

# WRITING EXERCISES

who is open-minded about gender roles. Make careful observations about physical appearance, roles and personality, and make sure to answer the following questions in your review:

- » In what ways does the director conform to stereotypical gender roles to create the characters?
- » In what ways does the director challenge the stereotypical gender roles to create the characters?
- » What messages does the movie send to its audience about gender?

**8.** There are many popular songs that deal with what it means to be female in our culture. Some examples are **Jewel's** *I'm Sensitive* and **No Doubt's** *Just a Girl*. Find a song that uses 'what it means to be a girl/woman' as its theme. Write a magazine article about the song. Explain the messages it sends and explore the effect that this song has on the culture.

**9.** Write an article to be published in a high school or college newspaper that reviews **Jean Kilbourne's** film, *Killing Us Softly 3*. Be thoughtful and thorough.

**10.** Directed Journal Writings about Gender **Handout 13A.**

# ACTIVISM & ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

“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**

One of Kilbourne’s key points in this video is that 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. *(For definitions of activism and advocacy, see the **Media Literacy Circle of Empowerment.**)*

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 a letter of this type, see <http://www.fair.org/activism/activismkit.html>. For sample letters, see <http://about-face.org/yv/action/letters/>.

For a collection of offensive ads, go to <http://about-face.org> and click on “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, go to <http://about-face.org/gow/>

**3.** Check out the media literacy websites on MEF’s resource page (<http://www.mediaed.org>)  
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. **Handout 13B.**

**5.** Create a magazine which satirizes a popular fashion magazine. Write articles that accentuate the messages that you currently notice. Create extreme advertisements. **Handout 13B.**

**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.)

# ACTIVISM & ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

7. Write a song – or poem – that expresses your views about the media and the cultural pressures. (Some current songs which do this are **Pink's** *Don't Let Me Get Me* and **TLC's** *Unpretty*.)
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 an “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.