

MEDIA EDUCATION
FOUNDATION
STUDY GUIDE



Challenging media

SLIM HOPES

ADVERTISING & THE OBSESSION WITH THINNESS | FEATURING JEAN KILBOURNE

CONTENTS

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SYNOPSIS & KEY POINTS

The average woman in the United States today is 5'4", 140 pounds. The average model is 5'11", 117 pounds.¹ In *Slim Hopes*, **Jean Kilbourne** explores the nature and implications of this striking disconnect between fantasy and reality.

Given the severity of the gap between cultural ideals of beauty and the actual physical appearance of women in our society, Kilbourne argues that it should not be surprising that eighty percent of American women say they are dissatisfied with how they look and that almost half of American women report being on a diet on any given day.² She explores this sense of women's alienation from their own bodies by critically examining the restrictive portrayals of the female body in advertising and the relationship of these portrayals to the obsession of girls and women with dieting and thinness. She argues that advertising messages and the media's incessant focus on celebrities shape what our culture views as desirable, and in the process shows how abnormal thinness comes to be conflated with normative definitions of beauty. The result, she argues, is that a large segment of the female population is left wanting.

More specifically, Kilbourne offers an analysis of the complex relationship between advertising and disordered eating, and examines how messages about thinness interact with messages about food and exercise to reinforce dangerous, unhealthy and often contradictory attitudes about body size and diet. In this way, against the backdrop of advertising's cult of thinness, she looks at the paradoxical trend in advertising that glamorizes emotional eating and implies that "you can never have too much" – a mixed message that encourages attitudes that lead to bingeing even as dominant images of thinness undermine healthy notions of appetite. One of her abiding concerns is that this persistent yet subtle association of food with intimacy carries particular dangers for women who struggle with binge-eating disorders and bulimia, since bingeing often involves satisfying emotional rather than physical hunger.

Uncovering these and other themes in advertising, Kilbourne therefore shows how media possess immense power both to produce and reinforce often contradictory eating-disordered attitudes. At the same time that advertising emotionalizes food, women are sent the message that they shouldn't eat too much, and that the best way to achieve power and respect is through the control of their bodies. Kilbourne links such advertising themes with the actual psychological, physiological and interpersonal realities of actual women's lives, providing an insightful and important analytic framework for considering the impact of advertising on women's health.

KEY POINTS

- » Women are sold the myth that they can, and should, achieve physical perfection to have value in our culture.
- » What's defined and reinforced as "physical perfection" in advertising is an unhealthy standard of thinness unattainable by most women.
- » Women's bodies are constantly turned into objects in advertising in order to sell products. Often, women's bodies are dismembered – just one part of the body focused on and used to sell a product.
- » In recent years, computer retouching has emerged as a primary advertising technique, with photographs digitally retouched to make 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 for women who don't exist.

1. <http://nationaleatingdisorders.org>

2. *ibid*

SYNOPSIS & KEY POINTS

- » Advertisers themselves acknowledge that they sell more than products, that the images in advertising affect the reality of our lives.
- » 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 women who are overweight.
- » Media images of female beauty influence everyone. They influence how women feel about themselves, and they influence how men feel about the actual women in their lives.
- » Although models tend to be genetically thin, they, too, sometimes develop eating disorders.
- » While there is a lot of talk that the 'waif look' is out, and that the 'voluptuous look' is in, this conceals the fact that an increasing number of models have had breast implants and project exaggerated standards of fitness.
- » Most women who have had breast implants lose sensation in their breasts, meaning that their breasts become an object of someone else's pleasure rather than being pleasurable in themselves. In this way, the woman literally moves from being a subject to an object.
- » Often, body doubles are used in films, TV commercials and advertising – yet another trend in virtual femininity.
- » Advertising is not solely to blame for the cultural obsession with thinness. However, there is no aspect of our culture that is as pervasive and persuasive as advertising.
- » As girls reach adolescence, they get the message that they should not be too powerful, should not take up too much space – a constant message 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 increasingly to sell cigarettes.
- » The tobacco industry has to get 3,000 children to start smoking every single day simply to replace those smokers who die or quit.
- » Ninety percent of all smokers start before age 18. Sixty percent start before high school.
- » 4 out of 5 women are dissatisfied with their appearance.³
- » Almost half of American women are on a diet on any given day.⁴
- » 5-10 million women are struggling with serious eating disorders.⁵
- » The American food industry spends \$36 billion on advertising each year.
- » Women's magazines are full of ads for rich foods and recipes.
- » Food and diet products are often advertised with the language of morality. Words such as "guilt" and "sin" are often used to sell food.

3. <http://nationaleatingdisorders.org>

4. *ibid*

5. *ibid*

SYNOPSIS & KEY POINTS

- » Americans spend more than \$36 billion dollars on dieting and diet-related products each year.⁶
- » 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.
- » Thinness is today's equivalent of virginity.
- » Women are shamed for eating, for having an appetite for food.
- » There is a double standard for men and women surrounding eating.
- » Control is often associated with thinness in advertising.
- » The obsession with thinness is related to the infantilization of women and the trivialization of women's power.
- » Prejudice against fat people, particularly against fat women, is one of the last socially accepted forms of prejudice.
- » In a survey that asked middle-aged women what they would most like to change about their lives, over half said their weight.
- » In a survey that gave three magic wishes for anything they wanted to girls aged 11-17, the number one wish for almost all of them was to lose weight and keep it off.
- » Changes in advertising will depend on an aware, active, educated public that thinks of itself primarily as citizens rather than as consumers.

6. updated statistic from *Killing Us Softly 3*

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/pdf/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

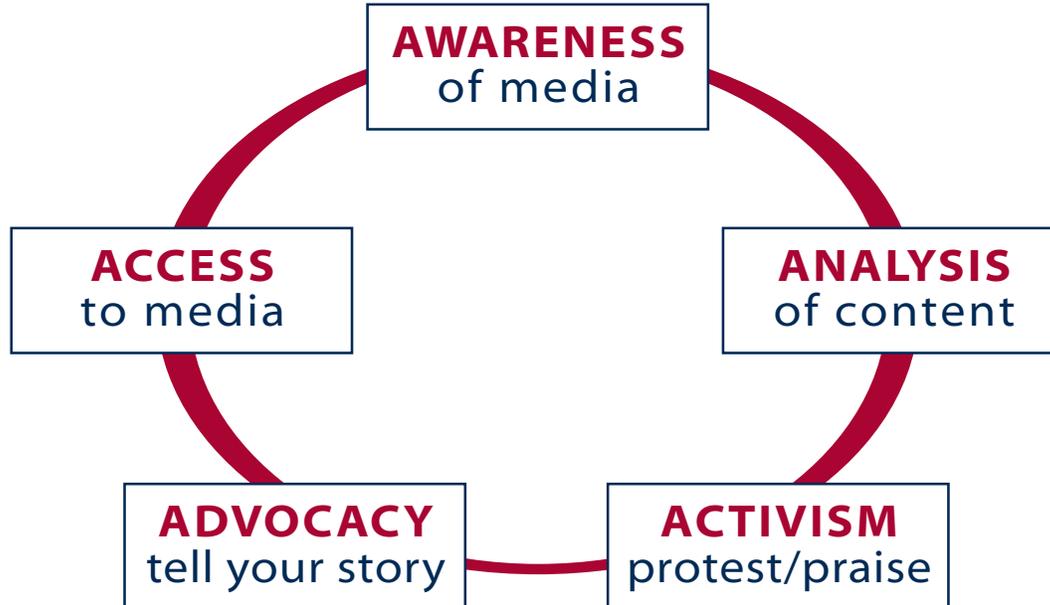
The exercises in this guide, as well as the content, have the potential to open dialogue. Be prepared for the possibility that students might speak candidly about their own feelings about their bodies. The teacher or facilitator, "should listen acutely to students' personal experiences, even if they 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 educational hand-outs about Eating Disorders, go to **<http://nationaleatingdisorders.org>**.
- » For info about Eating Disorders, see *National Eating Disorder Association* (**<http://nationaleatingdisorders.org>**) or *Something-Fishy* (**<http://www.something-fishy.org>**)
- » For info about domestic violence, see the *National Coalition of Domestic Violence* (**<http://www.ncadv.org>**)
- » For info about rape, see *Learn More about Rape* (**[http://www.callrape.com/info.htm#Rape, Relationships, Attitudes](http://www.callrape.com/info.htm#Rape,Relationships,Attitudes)**)

* *National Eating Disorder Association's GO GIRL'S!* curriculum <http://nationaleatingdisorders.org>

THE MEDIA LITERACY CIRCLE OF EMPOWERMENT⁷



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 GO GIRLS! Curriculum, (c) 1999 (<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/gogirls.html>)

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

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?

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 the 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

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*

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.⁸ 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

OBJECTIFICATION

“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

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?

- » 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.

SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

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

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?
 - » 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

"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

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.

SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

- » 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?

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)

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?

SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

THE TRIVIALIZATION OF POWER

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

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*.

- » 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 OBSESSION WITH THINNESS

"...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*

SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

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.
- » 4 out of 5 women are dissatisfied with their appearance.⁹
- » Almost half of American women are on a diet on any given day.¹⁰
- » 5-10 million women are struggling with serious eating disorders.¹¹

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

EXERCISE 1: ADVERTISING & BODY IMAGE

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.” **National Eating Disorders website**
(<http://www.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?

9. <http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>

10. *ibid*

11. *ibid*

SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

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

EXERCISE 2: BODY IMAGE (CONTINUED)

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)

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?
- » 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)

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 information about this topic, see *Killing Us Softly 3, Recovering Bodies* and *Reviving Ophelia*.

SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

FOOD & ADVERTISING

"[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."¹² The association between food and intimacy can be dangerous for women who struggle with binge eating disorders and bulimia, since binging 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 binging. 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 binging. These ideas support dangerous eating-disordered behaviors.

EXERCISE 1: ADVERTISING & FOOD

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?

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

SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

- » 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 *Recovering Bodies* and *Reviving Ophelia*.

IS IT INTENTIONAL?

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?

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» What does this ad tell you about the intentions of advertisers?

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

» 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?

MAINSTREAM MESSAGES ABOUT HEALTH

In a recent study which surveyed 498 girls at two Salt Lake City-area high schools, 92% of girls reported that they read health and fitness magazines, and 45% reported reading them frequently (or at least once a month).¹³ Another recent study of adolescent girls found that the media is their main source of information about women's health issues.¹⁴ With the media playing a pivotal role in their understanding of health, it is important for students to critically examine the information they rely on, much of which is driven by corporate advertising interests.

Objectives:

1. Students will recognize bias against fat in articles and examine how this shapes the information being delivered.
2. Students will recognize how images and articles work together to create a cumulative, cultural perspective on weight and food.

EXERCISE 1

Visit the link below for an article entitled *How America is Making You Fat* written by **Mary Ellen Strote** and **Courtney Rubin** and published in *Shape Magazine*, a publication self-described as a "source for women's exercise, health, and nutrition advice."

<http://www.shapemag.com/magazines/magViewer/FitnMagArt.asp?Catid=233&Objid={2C648B9D-0F67-11D5-B8A0-0090277C0A31}&curpage=1&curCatID=443&SuperCID=443&CID=B&SubCID=A>

After reading the article, answer the following questions:

1. What point of view does this article have toward fat? Give examples to support your reasoning.
2. Some of the words and phrases used in the article include: "crush", "Pillsbury Doughboy proportions", "swollen state of affairs", "hefty", and "jumbo-izing." Re-read the article and notice how and where these words/phrases are used. What attitude toward fat is implied with these words and phrases?
3. Re-read the section entitled *Big and Bigger*. Focus on the following two statements in that section:
"... which means that even an hour at the gym may not be enough to stave off extra pounds."
"So even if you are running six miles a day, that's only about 600-700 calories you have kissed goodbye."

13. Shorr, Melissa. "Girls with Eating Disorders Fans of Fitness Mags," *American Journal of Health Education* 2001; 32: 130-35.

14. <http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>

SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

- » What, according to these statements, is the purpose of exercise?
- » What are some other purposes of exercise? Does this article discuss these other purposes?
- » How might a person prone to compulsive exercising respond and react to these statements?
- » A popular misconception about Bulimia Nervosa is that it always involves vomiting up food after a binge. In truth, a purge is defined as compensatory behavior used “to make up for the excessive calories taken in: self-induced vomiting, laxative or diuretic abuse, fasting, **and/or obsessive or compulsive exercise**”¹⁵ (*bolding added for emphasis*). Therefore, when excessive exercise is used to compensate for a binge, it is defined as a purge. How might the above statements in the *Shape* article encourage a binge-purge mentality?

4. At the end of the introduction to the article, it reads, “Here are the ways America is making you fat – and how to fight back.” Later in the article, a section is titled, *Taking up Arms in the Battle of the Bulge*.

- » How do these statements associate weight and war? What do you think of this association? Do you feel it’s healthy? Unhealthy? Why? Why not? What might be some potential psychological consequences of associating these two concepts?

5. The following line appears in one of the sections: “This means trouble because while variety in fruits and vegetables is our ally, it’s our enemy when it comes to snack foods.”

- » What is implied by associating the word “ally” with fruits and vegetables and the word “enemy” with snack foods?
- » What emotions are evoked by polarizing foods in this way?
- » What effects might this polarization have on the way people feel about eating? about themselves?

6. One of the sections is entitled *Taking Control of Your Eating*.

- » What is implied by the language in this section title?
- » In what ways is control associated with thinness?
- » How might the association of control and thinness be limiting and/or dangerous?

Hand out *N.E.D.A.’s kNOw Dieting* (available on-line at <http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>) to your students.

7. What point of view does E.D.A.P. have of fat? Weight loss? Give examples to support your reasoning.

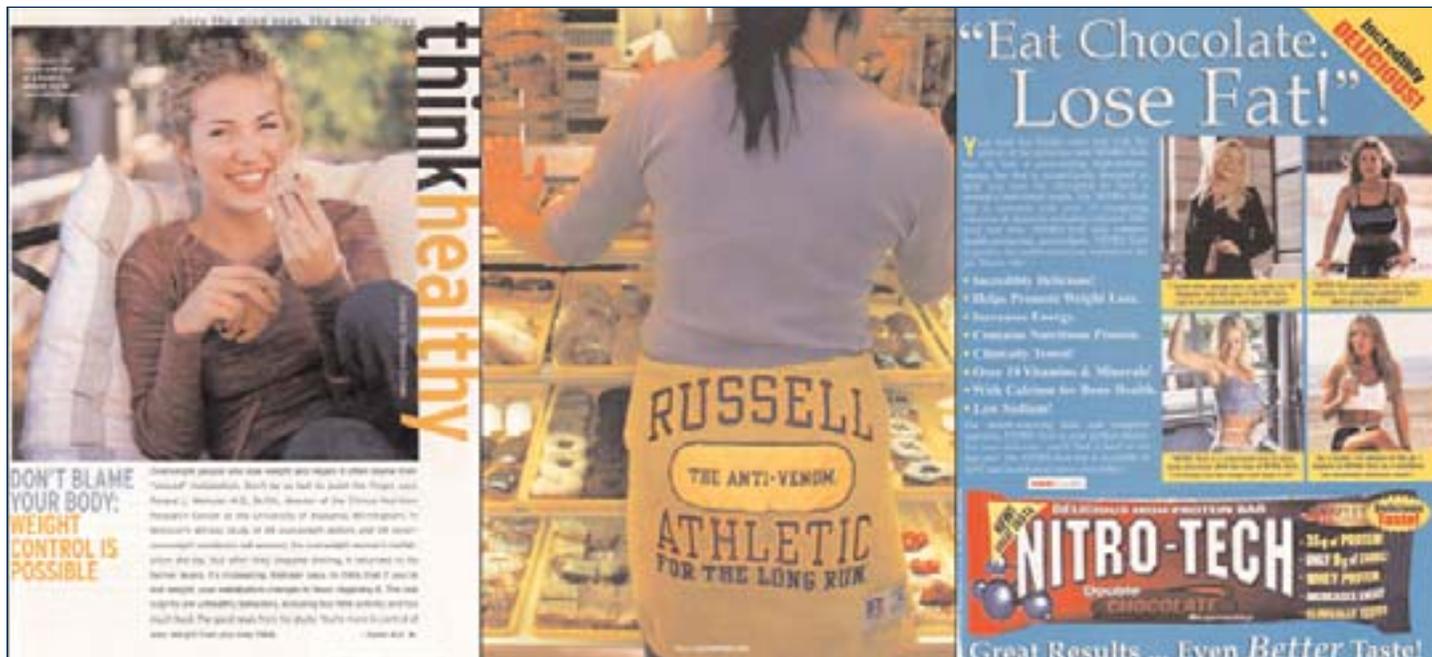
8. How does N.E.D.A.’s point of view of fat differ from the overall point of view of the article? Which point of view do you think is more objective? Why? Which point of view do you find more compelling? Why?

9. What unbiased information is provided in *How America is Making You Fat*? How do you discern between objective and subjective information? Why is it important to be aware of subjectivity in an article? How can being aware of subjective information about weight in our culture help you become better informed?

15. <http://www.edap.org/edinfo/bulimia.html>

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The following advertisements and images ran in a recent issue of *Shape Magazine*.



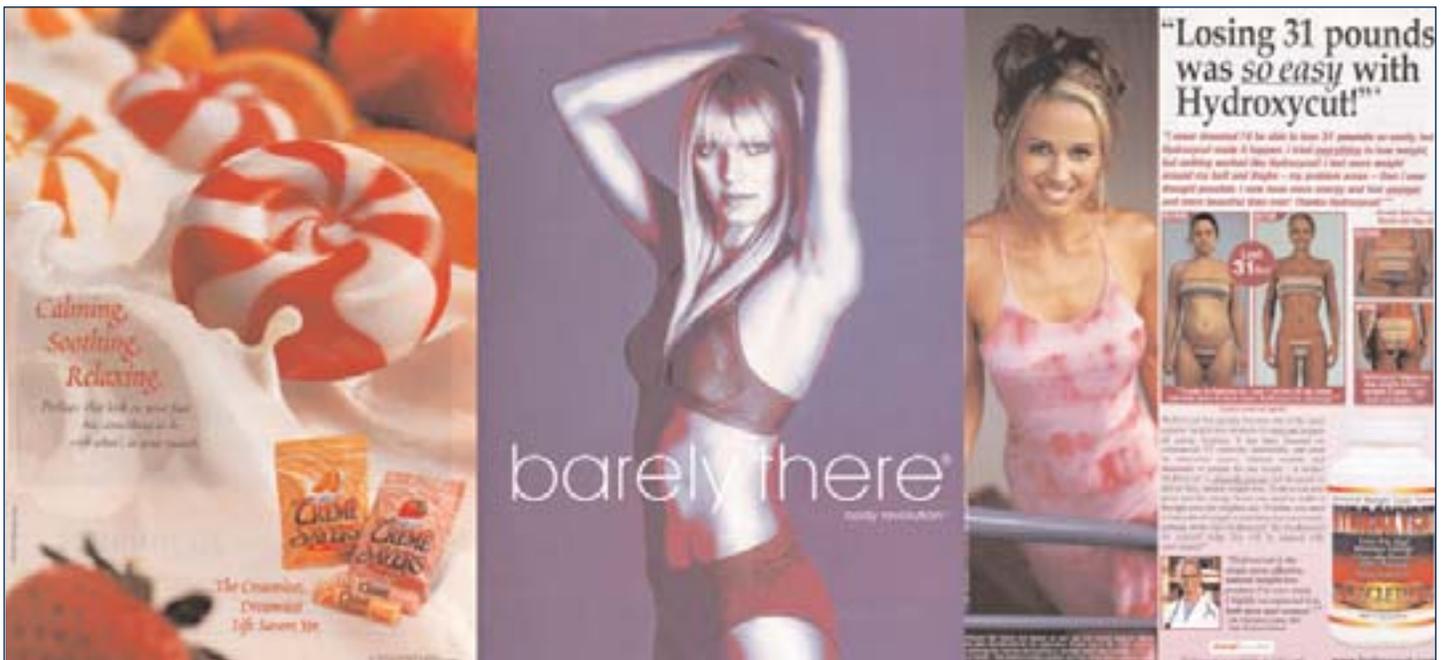
10. What is each of these advertisements saying, implying or promising?
11. In what ways do these advertisements/images share the point of view in the article?
12. What do you think is the combined effect of the articles, advertisements for diet products and images of thin models?
13. What are things people can do to resist these messages?

13. Shorr, Melissa. "Girls with Eating Disorders Fans of Fitness Mags," *American Journal of Health Education* 2001; 32: 130-35.
14. <http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>

SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

EXERCISE 2

Images and messages do not act in isolation. Rather, they each become a part of our cumulative understanding of the world. The following collage of advertisements offers an example of the varied (and often conflicting) messages we receive in our culture about food and weight. Examine the collage and then answer the discussion questions.



- » What do you notice about the collage? What messages does it send?
- » In what ways are the messages consistent with one another? In what ways are the messages in conflict with each other?
- » In what ways do you see these messages playing out in your life or in the lives of people you know?
- » What can people do to resist the conflicts in these messages?

CIGARETTES & THE OBSESSION WITH THINNESS

For many women in the United States, the 1920s stand as a significant moment in women's liberation – women gained the right to vote, and with it, they gained a greater sense of independence and power. However, the 1920s also mark the beginning of cigarette advertising campaigns that explicitly targeted women. From the beginning, "tobacco advertising geared toward women included messages such as 'Reach for a *Lucky* instead of a sweet' to establish an association between smoking and slimness. The positioning of *Lucky Strike* as an aid to weight control led to more than a 300% increase in sales for this brand in the first year of the advertising campaign."¹⁵ In recent years, advertisers have furthered this phenomenon by associating the ability to have a voice and a choice with smoking. And the models remain exceptionally thin.

Objective:

Students will explore the messages of cigarette advertisements and recognize the associations made between smoking and liberation, control, thinness and glamour.

15. http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/sgr/sgr_forwomen/factsheet_marketing.htm

SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

EXERCISE 1

Examine the following archives of advertisements for brands of cigarettes designed for women:

Virginia Slims advertisement archive:

<http://www.wclynx.com/burntofferings/adsvirginiaslims.html>

Capri advertisement archive:

<http://www.geocities.com/SouthBeach/Palms/2120/capriads.htm>

Misty's advertisement archive:

<http://misty120s.com/Misty120s/index.shtml>

The following *Virginia Slims* advertisements ran in recent issues of *Mode Magazine*, a beauty and fashion magazine for women size 12, 14 or 16.



"Sometimes I need a moment to catch up with Myself."



"The world is my oyster, and I love pearls."



"If you're going to enter, make an Entrance."



"Never hesitate to create new Options."

SECTION INTRODUCTIONS & EXERCISES

- » What do you notice about the way the models are posed? the language in the ads? the names of the cigarettes?
 - » What do the ads imply or promise?
 - » What feelings or ways of being are associated with each brand of cigarettes?
 - » In what ways do the advertisements equate smoking with thinness? control? confidence? power? freedom? glamour?
 - » When a woman smokes, in what ways does she give up power, freedom, control and glamour?

WRITING EXERCISES

Although the exercises in this section are primarily meant to be writing exercises, many can be adapted for use as classroom activities. Likewise, the classroom exercises and activism/advocacy activities can be adapted as writing exercises. For more writing exercises, see the teacher's guide for *Killing Us Softly 3*.

1. Read **Walt Whitman's** *I Sing the Body Electric*.

- » Write an analysis of the poem.
- » Write an imitation poem of *I Sing the Body Electric*.

2. Choose a same-gender relative with whom you share physical characteristics. Write a letter to this relative, thanking him/her for the physical characteristics you share. Assign positive qualities or functions to each characteristic. (*i.e. Thank you Mom – and all the women in our family, for that matter – for my height. We're short so that we walk close to the earth. We're grounded in natural rhythms, and we're intuitive.*) You might wish to write to more than one relative.

3. Write a research report on Bulimia Nervosa, Anorexia Nervosa, or Binge Eating Disorder.

4. Write a research report on Males and Eating Disorders.

5. Read **Ch. 7, "Joyous Body: The Wild Flesh,"** in **Clarissa Pinkola Estes'** *Women Who Run With the Wolves*. Create a dialogue between **Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Ph.D.** and **Mary Ellen Strote**, co-author of *How America is Making You Fat* (see **Mainstream Health Messages, Exercise 1**). The object of this writing exercise is to demonstrate your understanding of the two points of view and to explore how these perspectives might interact.

6. Write an Op-Ed for the school newspaper that explains to the school population what you understand about the connections between media messages and our cultural obsession with thinness.

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 a sample letter, see http://about-face.org/gallery/topten_archives/newten2/dana1.html.

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/light/progress/galleries.html>

3. Check out the media literacy websites on MEF’s resource page on their website (<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.