CONNECT!ONS Med!aLit moments

In This Issue…

Theme: Sexism in Media

An Overview

In October 2008, Newsweek magazine published an issue featuring an extreme close-up of Republican Vice-Presidential candidate Sarah Palin on its cover. The close-up prompted criticism for its unflattering view of Palin's face, and one political commentator argued that the photo should have been retouched before publication. The reaction to the Palin close-up raises the question of whether some standard of beauty is desirable for a female political candidate.

What is clear is that the majority of media offer images of beauty to young girls which are virtually impossible to attain. Many of those images also offer a hyper-sexualized model of feminine identity for girls to emulate. In this issue, you'll find reviews of two films from the Media Education Foundation which will help you discuss issues of media, sexuality and gender identity with your students and children.

Fortunately, there are many resources available which parents and educators can use to help young women improve their self-esteem and make healthier choices. Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty (www.campaignforrealbeauty.com), featured in the MediaLit Moment for this issue, is a good starting point. The campaign trains adults in facilitating self-esteem workshops, and offers videos and interactive quizzes to girls to help them exercise their critical thinking skills about beauty industry advertising. About Face (www.about-face.org) offers a more activist approach to challenging the beauty and fashion industry. Based in San Francisco, About Face sponsors action groups of teen girls who work on their own media campaigns, presents media literacy workshops to schools and organizations, and maintains a gallery of worthy advertisements as well as a revolving "gallery of offenders." The YWCA's report *Beauty at Any Cost* (www.ywca.org) addresses the consequences of America's beauty obsession and offers discussion and action guides for women and girls. New Moon (www.newmoon.com) and Teen Voices Online (www.teenvoices.com) facilitate online discussions and regularly publish creative work by girls.

Jean Kilbourne is a scholar, author, and documentarist who has spoken on many college campuses (Kilbourne is also the creator of the Media Education Foundation video "Killing Us Softly 3: Advertising's Image of Women.") The resources section of her website (www.jeankilbourne.com) is a good point of entry for research on issues of concern to young women. In 2006, The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (www.thegeenadavisinstitute.org) in cooperation with the Annenberg School for Communication, released a path-breaking study in 2006 on representations of women in TV and film by Professor Stacy Smith, and the GDIGM site offers additional resources for research. The American Psychological Association (www.apa.org) assigned a task force to examine "the psychological theory, research, and clinical experience addressing the sexualization of girls via media and other cultural messages" and includes recommendations for additional research, education and training. The Kaiser Family Foundation (www.kff.org) has released a number of studies on media and youth, and publishes several research studies on media and health each year.

New Media Education Foundation Films on Sexism in Media

Shelly: *"Hearing about people with eating disorders in the film industry or music industry or anything like that, it just made it more normal. It made it more okay to be anorexic or to have an eating disorder."*
From *Generation M: Misogyny in Media and Culture*

Filmmaker Thomas Keith's "Generation M: Misogyny in Media and Culture," persuasively lays out the case that media and contemporary culture conspire to limit the life opportunities of young women.

Keith argues that, despite progress towards a more egalitarian society, most contemporary media and popular culture products present hyper-sexualized figures, from Lingerie Barbie to Nelly Furtado, as mainstream models for feminine empowerment. Keith also demonstrates how pop culture products, from Grand Theft Auto to hip hop songs, carve out narrow gender identities for young men based on aggression and domination.

In the final section of the film, Keith explores the topic of sexism in the music industry. Taking Eminem as an example, he notes the relative freedom that Eminem feels to write a song like "Kim," in which a male character threatens to throw his girlfriend into the trunk of his car. Keith responds with a provocative question: "Imagine Eminem making fun of black Americans or rapping about African Americans in hostile and demeaning ways. What would happen to his career as a rapper?"

Though "Generation M" does contain some explicit language and one example of animated violence, this is an excellent film for use in a high school setting. Girls will be able to identify with the many young women in the film who discuss their own thinking about female gender roles, while boys may well identify with Mentors in Violence Prevention founder Byron Hurt as he speaks out about young men confronting the pressure to act tough to gain respect from women. The film also includes a bonus chapter on media literacy, education and choice with various educational leaders, including CML President Tessa Jolls.

"The Price of Pleasure: Pornography, Sexuality and Relationships," by filmmakers Chyng Sun, Miguel Picker and Robert Wosnitzer explores two popular claims made to defend the porn industry--that pornography is just a fantasy, or that pornography is really helping people discover their own authentic sexuality. In one scene, the camera scans the faces of men waiting in line to view models at an adult entertainment expo in Las Vegas. The faces are flushed and expectant, yet eerily blank. Through expert interviews, anonymous interviews with victims, and anonymous interviews with men who have been addicted to pornography, the film presents a compelling view of the social fallout caused by pornographic fantasy, such as the consumption of images which make it difficult or impossible for men to achieve meaningful intimacy with their real-life partners; and the use of pornography to force female partners to accept physical abuse.

In the opening of the film, a young man shouts out, "It's d---- good porno that tells the truth!" If that's the case, the filmmakers ask, what kind of authentic sexuality is depicted in the pornography that most people are willing to watch? In the final chapter, the film discusses the

results of a carefully documented study by Dr. Chun and her NYU research team, which analyzed hundreds of scenes from the most popular pornography videos of 2005. The analysis reveals that over 80% of scenes contained acts of physical aggression. The film also examines the increasing use of physical violence in pornography, and asks whether this 'authentic' sexuality isn't driven by an industry which constantly seeks to expand the markets available to producers. The filmmakers also weave a tapestry of pop culture industry icons, from Howard Stern to Carmen Electra, to demonstrate how the industry--in addition to achieving nearly exponential growth--has gained unprecedented mainstream appeal. One chapter of the film chronicles the rise of "dorm porn" and other adult media produced by college-age youth. The film's coverage of this issue alone is likely to stimulate discussion among students, parents and college administrators alike.

Both films include study guides designed to engage students in discussion long after the films have been aired. With key points, discussion questions, and suggested assignments for each chapter, the guides offer a wealth of resources to aid teachers in curriculum planning as well. Visit www.MediaEd.org.

CML News

Dublin Community Access Station Adopts CML Framework

Northeast Access Radio, a media co-op established in 1995 encourages residents of Dublin, Ireland to produce their own media. NEAR's locally produced cultural radio programming includes Novel Intercultural, a forum for local library clubs to discuss books and culture from around the world with immigrants to Dublin from Romania, China, Latin America and the Islamic world. And NEAR volunteers have interviewed a variety of high-profile guests, from a respected author on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to an eye witness at the scene of the Bloody Sunday shootings of 1972. Many of NEAR's original programs can be accessed at its website, www.near.ie

Media literacy has been a primary concern at NEAR for some time. NEAR staff began to teach media literacy modules to volunteers at an early stage by deploying a "Uses and Gratifications" theory to pose questions to volunteers; for example, if the media do so much for us in terms of information and entertainment, what are they doing to us during the interaction? As Development Coordinator Jack Byrne observes, the teaching modules functioned well as awareness raising exercises, but volunteers still tended to approach practical media generation work as an end in itself even after taking these courses. So Byrne and his colleagues set out to find an organization which could help volunteers move from asking questions about the media to applying their insights to development of content.

NEAR is piloting the CML framework, and may offer it in the future to the growing network of community media outlets spreading across Ireland. Byrne has high hopes for the project: "We believe that a media network that is in itself media literate will enhance the possibilities of one sector of media offering media literacy to citizens, both in its programming and in its wider influence on society."

Med!aLit moments

Introducing MediaLit Moments!

MediaLit Moments are short clips and/or activities that provide teachable 'AHA' moments to illustrate one of the *Five Key Questions* for media literacy. Designed for ease of use in the classroom, lessons require limited preparation and are easily downloadable.

This month's MediaLit Moment: *Making of a Model*   (see page 8)

CONSORTIUM for MEDIA LITERACY

Uniting for Development

About Us…

The Consortium for Media Literacy addresses the role of global media through the advocacy, research and design of media literacy education for youth, educators and parents.

The Consortium focuses on K-12 grade youth and their parents and communities. The research efforts include nutrition and health education, body image/sexuality, safety and responsibility in media by consumers and creators of products. The Consortium is building a body of research, interventions and communication that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for youth.

Media Literacy Resources

Tip of the Month: By using a four-step inquiry process of Awareness, Analysis, Reflection and Action, young people acquire an empowering set of "navigational" skills for interacting with media.

IFC Media Project Available for Download

In November 2008, the Independent Film Channel launched "The IFC Media Project," a six-part series designed to arm viewers with critical tools for deconstructing news media in the United States. Along the way, the series mounts in-depth critique of news media, from analysis of contemporary news fixations and taboos to investigative reporting on the lack of relevant, timely coverage of the recent Wall Street crisis. Organizations consulted by IFC for this project include the National Association for a Media Literate America and the Media Education Lab at Temple University. The series is both funny and thought-provoking. The first episode spins the bizarre tale of a media consultant who brokers stories on abducted children. In another episode, series host Gideon Yago interviews The Yes Men, who have managed to impersonate corporate functionaries on a number of news magazine programs. The two minute animated News Junkie segments, which offer incisive commentary on issues such as the prevalence of narcissism in the information age, are also hilarious tours de force.

The IFC website (www.ifc.com) features additional material, including a downloadable "Decoding the Media" handbook with a substantial listing of media literacy resources and video highlights of expert panels convened by IFC to complement the series. Though the series has not yet been released on DVD, individual episodes can be purchased at iTunes at a cost of $8.99 each. The series is targeted primarily to an adult audience, and parents should pre-view episodes if they wish to share them with their children.

Featured sites in this issue:

About Face
American Psychological Association
Consortium for Media Literacy
Dove Campaign for Real Beauty
Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media
Independent Film Channel
Kaiser Family Foundation
Media Education Foundation
YWCA

Express Yourself! We invite you to write your Congressional representative to express the need for media literacy education in our schools www.house.gov/writerep

Med!aLit Moments

Making of a Model

The beauty and fashion industries spare no expense in transforming models into goddess-like figureheads for company advertising. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will take an inside look at some of the techniques used to make this transformation happen.

Ask students to identify the techniques used to turn a woman into a billboard model.

AHA!: A lot of people do a lot of work to create the image I see on a billboard or in a magazine ad!

Key Question #2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

Grade Level: 9+

Materials: Computer with internet access, data projector and screen.

The goal of Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty (http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.com) is to "widen definitions of beauty" in an attempt to free women from constrictive beauty stereotypes. The website features a number of videos, including its "Evolution" video http://www.dove.us/#/features/videos/videogallery.aspx/

This video begins with an initial photo shoot of a woman, then lurches into fast motion as it depicts the application of make-up, hairstyling, and digital enhancements used to turn her into a fashion photo image. The video is just over a minute in length.

Questions for Discussion: What techniques were used to make this woman look so flawless? What changes had to be made to her appearance? Is this type of beauty attainable for the advertiser's audience?

Further Discussion: The video ends with the message: "No wonder our perception of beauty is distorted. Every girl deserves to feel beautiful just the way she is." As you prepare to lead this discussion, consider Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view.

You may also want to lead students in a discussion of the Campaign for Real Beauty. As you prepare, consider: Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent? and Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy's MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, © 2002-2009, Center for Media Literacy, www.medialit.com