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Have you ever wondered what to say to students after telling them that the model in the magazine ad bears no semblance to reality? In this MediaLit Moment, your students get the chance to respond by using the power of story to create real lives for the models they see in advertisements.

Theme: Media and Body Image

In an article on body image and nutrition, *Teen Health and the Media*, a project of the University of Washington College of Education, points out that advertising media send contradictory messages to young audiences, especially girls: “On one hand, they are bombarded daily with advertisements for junk food and fast food on television and magazines, yet the same magazines and television shows that serve up these ads also celebrate the waif look by portraying pencil-thin models.” According to Carole Counihan, author of *The Anthropology of Food and Body*, this contradiction is not coincidental: “. . .the economy depends on manipulating customers to buy as much food as possible, and one way is to project simultaneously the urge to eat and the need to diet” (quoted in Wykes and Gunter, *Media and Body Image*, p. 48).

An analogous argument can be made about women and body image, namely that our economy depends on manipulating women into becoming repeat customers willing to “make over” their bodies again and again. Advertising allays women’s anxieties about their appearance by offering solutions involving re-construction of the body, from apparel to cosmetics to plastic surgery. But these offer only temporary solutions, and more is always needed. The most successful advertising will stimulate perpetual, if not obsessive attention to the body.

At the same time that fashion-oriented media normalize the continuous re-construction of women’s bodies, they emphasize the performance of specific gender roles in which women compete to win the attention of men. For example, “Bridalplasty,” a current E! Network show, follows twelve engaged women who compete for the wedding of their dreams, which will also include their dream plastic surgery procedure.

What messages might teen boys and girls “take away” from this show? Media literacy is urgently needed to help teens understand the interplay between the values embedded in all these media and the purposes for which they are produced.

In our research section, we look at a recent survey regarding teen girls and their attitudes toward media and fashion. We also report on new research from the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media on the representation of women in family films. Our resources section provides a variety of sources for advocacy and education, and our MediaLit Moment gives students the chance to transform fashion models from mythical standard bearers of beauty to real human beings with individual life stories.

Sources Cited:

Wykes, Maggie, and Gunter, Barrie, *The Media and Body Image*. London: Sage Publications, 2005.

Research Highlights

Culture, Media and Body Image

In December 2009, the Girl Scout Research Institute and TRU Research surveyed 1002 girls aged 13-17 regarding their body image perceptions and their attitudes towards the media and fashion industries. Nine out of ten responded that the fashion/media industries placed “a lot of pressure” on teenage girls to be thin. Taken in its entirety, however, the survey results reveal a “love/hate” relationship between teen girls and the fashion industry. Respondents did make some sober assessments of the fashion industry: 63% felt that the body image represented by the fashion industry was “unrealistic,” and 28% said that the fashion industry body image was “sick.” And yet 75% said that fashion was “really important” to them, and 48% wished they were “as skinny” as the models in fashion magazines.

If girls simply felt pressure from the fashion industry to be thin, measures like the 2006 Spanish ban on underweight models on fashion runways would be a sensible solution to the problem. But if girls recognize the “thin ideal” as unrealistic yet still wish to realize it for themselves, expunging “thin” images and bodies from screen and runway may not have much impact on the choices that teen girls make.

Fashion shows, marketing and media would not work on the minds of teen girls if they did not already resonate with culturally acceptable models of femininity. Models motivate behavior when they’re modeling a way of life. For example, survey research of exposure to “thin” television programs suggests that programs with thin characters exert the greatest effect on viewers when viewers perceive them as role models. When viewers perceive them in this way, they will tend to use those characters as body image yardsticks for self and others and demonstrate a stronger drive for thinness (Wykes and Gunter, *The Media and Body Image*, p.167). The effect may be heightened when the same role models appear in multiple media—when they appear in commercials, in award shows, in “exclusive” print interviews. In this way, female models and celebrities star in a coherent narrative with a common message: thin is beautiful and sexy, and thin is successful.

In *The Beauty Myth* (1990) Naomi Wolf argued that, since the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, Western societies have accepted a liberated femininity which allowed women to stand beside men as competent professionals in the workplace, but that this model of femininity is circumscribed by one requirement--women must maintain their beauty in order to remain successful. Today, advertising for the fashion and cosmetic industries has perfected a new version of an old narrative, an American dream for women which reflects our culture’s conditional acceptance of liberated femininity. By spending their hard-earned cash on cosmetics or a new outfit, women can find the great career—and even the right man--that they’ve been dreaming of. Television series such as *Sex in the City*, in which successful women leverage their wealth to find or keep Mr. “Big,” extend the narrative even further.

But surely in 2011 there must be countervailing role models in the media--successful, independent women who are valued for their character rather than their looks? Yes, but even these role models will tend to “have it all.” Try conducting your own research, at home, or with your students. Select and analyze news media (online or off) which stake their reputation on objectivity and balance rather than fashion magazines and others which primarily cover the lives of celebrities. (The survey of several British newspapers by Wykes and Gunter may be a good example to follow). How many independent, successful women appear in the news section? How many stories on successful women do you find in any section which do not highlight their beauty or their relationship with a famous man? When you do find them, make sure to share them!

A summary of the Girl Scout/TRU survey can be accessed at:
http://www.girlscouts.org/research/pdf/beauty_redefined_factsheet.pdf

Additional sources:

Wolf, Naomi, *The Beauty Myth*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1990.

Geena Davis Institute Releases Study on Representation of Women in Family Films

In October of last year, the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (GDIGM) released the results of a study of on-screen and behind-the-scenes representation of women in Hollywood family films. While many of the findings of this study echo the findings of earlier studies sponsored by GDIGM in 2006, a few offer grounds for cautious optimism regarding the possibility of change within the industry.

Stacy L. Smith and Marc Choueiti, faculty at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, were the lead researchers for the study. A content analysis was conducted of English language fictional family films released between September 2006 and September 2009. All 22 G-rated films released during this time period were analyzed and coded, and 50 PG and 50 PG-13 top-grossing films (based on top domestic box office revenues) were also analyzed.

Of the 5,554 speaking characters who appeared in this sample of 122 films, 29.2% were female, and 70.8% were male. In other words, male characters outnumbered female characters by a ratio of 2.42 to 1.

As these trends became apparent, Smith and Choueiti decided to conduct an analysis of a combined sample from the first study and the most recent study. Only top-grossing G, PG and PG-13 films released between 1990 and 2006 had been analyzed in the earlier study, so the Annenberg team analyzed the remaining G-rated films released during this period to match the ‘total population’ sample of G-rated films released between 2006 and 2009. The results? Representation of women in G, PG and PG-13-rated films released between 1990 and 2009

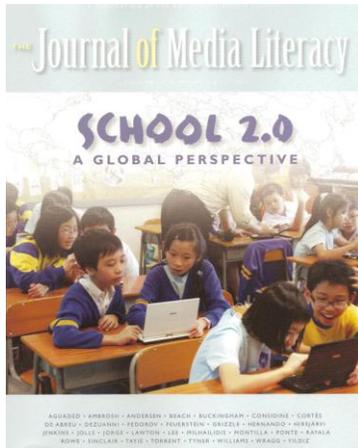
hovered somewhere between 25 and 30%, and never varied by more than 5%; Very little changed in the unequal representation of women in Hollywood films over nearly two decades.

Significant differences in the physical appearance of male and female characters were also revealed by the study of films released between 2006 and 2009. Female characters under the age of 21 appeared on screen more frequently than male characters in the same age range (20.5% vs. 12.5%). They appeared far more frequently than male characters in tight, sexy or alluring attire (24% vs. 4%), were more frequently depicted as physically attractive than male characters (14% vs. 3.6%), were portrayed with exposed skin between the mid chest and upper thigh more often than male characters (18.5% vs. 5.6%), and were far more likely to be depicted with a small waist than male characters (22.9% vs. 4.5%). Taken together, the appearance of women in these films reinforces the belief that youthfulness, beauty and a sexy demeanor are more important for females than for males. In presentations on this research, Davis comments, “Eye candy is not for kids.”

A survey of the 1565 directors, writers and producers working behind the scenes of these 122 films also revealed glaring inequalities between men and women. Only 7% of directors, 13% of writers and 20% of producers were female. Taken together, males outnumbered females in key production positions by a ratio of 4.88 to 1.

The outlook does improve when one or more females are involved in directing or writing family films. The representation of girls and women in these films increases significantly in comparison to films directed and written by men, and the percentage increase rises to 10.4% when one or more women are involved in the writing process. The results suggest that working with content creators may be one of the best avenues for changing the nature of gender portrayals on the silver screen. Smith and Choueiti comment, “Executives responsible for green-lighting pictures should be encouraged to think about gender diversification in their hiring practices for above-the-line personnel.”

To read this study, visit the Geena Davis Institute at <http://www.thegeenadavisinstitute.org>



CML Article Appears in Journal of Media Literacy

The Journal of Media Literacy, a biannual, theme-driven journal aimed at K-12 teachers, teacher educators, professors, community activists and media professionals around the world, has published an article by CML President and CEO Tessa Jolls in its most recent issue. Jolls' article, "A Glimpse at Qatar Through a Broadband Lens," is CML's contribution to an issue devoted to the theme "School 2.0: A Global Perspective."

Many of the contributors celebrate the liberatory potential of new media and communications technologies. Kathleen Tyner, Associate Professor of Radio, Film and Television at the University of Texas and author of *Literacy in a Digital Age*, lends academic weight to this view, arguing that young people seek outlets for relatively unfettered use of their digital literacy skills beyond the traditional classroom, with friends, family and networks, and prefer to use new media to actively engage in the social sphere.

A number of practical examples spread over several articles buttress this point of view. Tyner profiles after school and summer "knowledge labs" housed in museums and other non-profit institutions which offer opportunities to interact with experts and peers across the world in hands-on, creative and critical literacy activities. Articles contributed by educators from Israel, Austria and UNESCO demonstrate how educators can utilize digital media to help students assert their freedom to voice their opinions and to share and critically evaluate information and ideas.

Other articles, including Jolls', demonstrate that widespread use of digital media and communications tools is not an indicator of the state of media education within a country or region. Jolls observes that Qatar is marked by "a mix of 21st century skills and 7th century

customs.” Mobile phone penetration is close to 98%, and the current director of ictQatar, the functional equivalent of the FCC in the United States, is clearly conversant with the aims of media literacy education. Yet the educational system in Qatar is still dominated by rote learning.

Jolls’ experience at the 2010 Digital Communications Literacy Conference sponsored by ictQatar reflects that of other contributors to this issue: “. . .my informal conversations with conference representatives confirmed the discouraging perception that education systems everywhere are lagging when it comes to teaching media literacy and 21st century skills.”

To view the current issue, visit www.journalofmedialiteracy.org

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.

<http://www.ConsortiumforMediaLiteracy.org>

Media Literacy Resources

Teaching Tip: February 20-26 is National Eating Disorders Awareness Week. Use this week as an opportunity to discuss media and body image in your classroom. Try the MediaLit Moment offered with this newsletter, or access one of the web sites listed below for activities and information.

Media and Body Image Resources

Organizations

National Eating Disorders Association www.nationaleatingdisorders.org
NEDA is a national advocacy organization that has a wealth of resources for anyone concerned about eating disorders, from comprehensive information tool kits for parents and teachers, to videos of experts explaining current eating disorders research. The NEDA site includes practical suggestions for increasing awareness of eating disorders in your community.

Dove Campaign for Real Beauty www.campaignforrealbeauty.com
In 2004, Dove launched its Campaign for Real Beauty through a series of billboards which featured regular-sized female models. Since that time, the campaign has changed from a public relations initiative to a movement devoted to inspiring greater self-esteem for women and girls. The Campaign for Real Beauty's educational offerings include group workshops, activities for mothers and daughters, online quizzes and activities for girls, articles by self-esteem expert Jess Weiner, videos which expose the inner workings of the fashion industry, and more.

The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media www.thegeenadavisinstitute.org
Six years ago, while watching children's television programs and videos with her young daughter, Academy Award winner Geena Davis noticed a remarkable imbalance in the ratio of male to female characters. Davis raised funds for the largest research project ever undertaken on gender in children's entertainment, and today GDIGM utilizes research, education and advocacy to encourage entertainment industry producers and creators to become leaders for positive change. In October 2010, GDIGM partnered with the Girl Scouts of America to organize a "Healthy Media for Youth" summit in Washington, D.C.

Girl Scouts of America and Girls, Inc. www.girlscouts.org, www.girlsinc.org
The Girl Scouts and Girls Inc., founded respectively in 1912 and 1945, have worked for some time to build the health, resilience and leadership skills of American girls, and both organizations have good resources on girls, media and body image. Girls, Inc. offers a substantial, well-researched fact sheet on Girls and Media, and the Girl Scouts actively sponsors research in this field, including a recent survey on teen girls and social media.

Media Criticism

About-Face, Adios Barbie, and Guerilla Girls

<http://www.about-face.org>, <http://www.adiosbarbie.com>, <http://www.guerillagirls.com>

The About-Face website comments on a wide range of media images to develop a feminist media ethics and aesthetics, and encourages submissions from the public. About-Face also conducts media literacy workshops in San Francisco schools, helps young women mount feminist media campaigns in the community, and is currently developing a body image curriculum.

The Adios Barbie editorial team writes extensively on body image and media issues, and the website features some of the most intelligent, accessible commentary on current popular culture available online. The Guerilla Girls are culture jammers who raise awareness of sexism in contemporary art and cinema, and their website features posters and billboards from campaigns around the world.

Books

Stephen Hinshaw, with Rachel Kranz, *The Triple Bind: Saving Our Teenage Girls from Today's Pressures*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2009.

Hinshaw, chair of the UC Berkeley psychology department, attempts to answer the question, why do today's teenage girls, despite great opportunities, seem to be increasingly vulnerable to depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and other major risks to their health? Hinshaw argues that girls are in a triple bind: they're expected to be nurturing and supportive; to aggressively reach for those new opportunities; and to embody a sexualized model of feminine perfection. Through careful summaries of psychological and genetic research, case examples, and analysis of cultural (and media) influences, Hinshaw provides parents with strategies and tools for helping their daughters respond in healthy ways to the pressures they face.

Maggie Wykes and Barrie Gunter, *Media and Body Image*. London: Sage Publications, 2005. Though one or more chapters of this book delve into the realm of social theory, this is one of the few books which attempts a comprehensive analysis of the way in which media contribute to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating among women. The authors provide very good summaries of current survey and experimental research. They also take a strong feminist stance: women would not feel so pressured by media or the fashion industry if they did not live within a society and cultural climate which make them vulnerable to their influence.

Audrey Brashich, *All Made Up: A Girl's Guide to Seeing Through Celebrity Hype and Celebrating Real Beauty*. New York: Walker & Company, 2006.

Brashich, who had a brief modeling career, and has written for many teen and women's magazines, including *Sassy*, *YM*, *Seventeen*, *Shape*, and *Ms.*, shares personal stories with

young adult readers and gives them an inside look at the media and fashion industries. Brashich's intention is to help young adult readers balance enjoyment of the media they consume with critical recognition of the fantasy and hype that pervades the culture of celebrity.

Media

The Girl Scouts, "Watch What You Watch" PSA

<http://blog.girlscouts.org/2010/10/watch-what-you-watch.html>

Produced by the Girl Scouts in partnership with the Creative Coalition, and launched at the Healthy Media for Youth summit last October, "Watch What You Watch" is a playful, incisive ad that features A-list celebrities asking viewers to question what celebrities do and say on TV.

Media Education Foundation <http://www.mediaed.org>

"Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising's Image of Women" Educational scholar and feminist media activist Jean Kilbourne takes a fresh look at how advertising trades in distorted and destructive ideals of femininity, marshaling a range of new print and television advertisements to reveal a pattern of damaging gender stereotypes.

Also Suggested (but not free):

New Mexico Media Literacy Project <http://www.nmmlp.org>, media and body image DVD and curriculum

Short documentaries by Jesse Erica Epstein

http://www.newday.com/filmmakers/Jesse_Epstein.html

Jennifer Siebel Newsom, "Miss Representation"

<http://jennifersiebelnewsom.com/filmmaker.htm>

Julia Barry, "In Her Image: Producing Womanhood in America"

<http://juliabarry.com/inherimage/>

MediaLit Moments

What Could America's Top Models Be Thinking?

From an audience standpoint, so many fashion advertisements are problematic because they create standards for body shape, size and appearance that can never be attained. What about the models themselves? They represent something generic and standard-ized. Identity, personality--those things which make a person unique--are layered over, airbrushed, and retouched beyond recognition. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will be able to use the power of story to effectively strip away the layers which obscure the real people "behind" the images that they see in magazines.

Credit must also be given to the originators of this activity, "Teen Aware: Sex, Media and You," a project of the Teen Futures Media Network at the University of Washington. Here's a link to the original activity: <http://depts.washington.edu/taware/document.cgi?id=53> You can find the Teen Futures Media Network site, "Teen Health and the Media," at: <http://depts.washington.edu/thmedia/>

Have students write what a model might be thinking during a fashion shoot

AHA! Magazine ads turn models into fantastic, made-up figures that are supposed to make the product more sexy or glamorous, but they tell me nothing about what the models are like in real life!

Key Question #1: Who created this message?

Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed

Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power

Grade Level: 9-12

Materials: Magazine ads from both men's and women's magazines with photographs of top models posed to sell products based on their looks, style and/or suggestive behavior.

Activity: Begin by asking students to tell you something about the men and women they've seen in magazine advertisements. What do they look and act like? As students start sketching out the gender stereotypes used in these advertisements, note how impossibly sexy, glamorous or macho they are. Discuss one or more of the techniques (costumes, lighting, photo retouching, etc.) used to turn models into highly stylized images that have little to do with reality—all in service of selling the product.

What do they think these men and women might be like in real life?

Ask students to select an ad (or ads) and “re-humanize” the models in them by writing a thought-diary of one or two paragraphs in length which describes the feelings they might have had when the photograph was created. Ask them to write in first person, from the point of view of the model. This internal monologue can be as simple and mundane as, “My feet are killing me!,” or it could show the model wondering whether working in their occupation is really fulfilling their needs.

Have students read their thought diary to the class while displaying the original ad. Generate a discussion about the activity. How does imagining what the real person in the ad was thinking and feeling change the way students feel about the image used in the ad? What do they have to say about the difference between the real person and the image that the photographers worked so hard to create?

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, © 2002-2011, Center for Media Literacy, <http://www.medialit.com>