

UNDRESSING POP CULTURE

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Undressing Pop Culture

by

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Abstract

In the winter of 2010, I conducted a four-week media workshop entitled *Undressing Pop Culture* for a select group of first year Women's Studies students. This workshop critically examined depictions of women's agency and empowerment as illustrated through postfeminist media representations. The variety of media explored over the duration of the workshop included magazine advertisements, tween products, music videos, and sports images. A combined theoretical approach, drawing on feminist critiques of postfeminism, as well as aspects of critical media literacy, was used as a means for conducting the workshop. Critical analysis of postfeminist media representations occurred through documentary viewing, group discussion, and activities. Using these resources, a media literacy toolkit was developed for intended use as a teaching resource in introductory Women's Studies classes at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

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Introduction

Undressing Pop Culture: The Workshop was a project that came about through my own learning with media in the Women's Studies classroom. I came to Women's Studies late in my undergraduate studies, and it was not until the last year of my Bachelor of Arts degree that I took an introductory course. Women's Studies was always an area of some interest to me, but I felt no urgency to explore feminism, academically or socially for that matter. I was unsure, outside of a historical context, what was left to study about women's position in contemporary society. After all, as far as I could tell, issues of equality between men and women had long since been resolved. A woman could have a career, vote, marry, divorce, live alone, support herself financially, be, say, and do anything she wished; it was a mere matter of choice. Nevertheless, I took the course as an elective, and, to my surprise, my perspective changed, dramatically. I began to question my previous assumptions regarding the unlimited choices I thought women had, and, furthermore, I began to question how I came to those assumptions in the first place. My shift in perspective was due in large part to a variety of Media Education Foundation (MEF) documentaries used in this class to explore, analyze and debate women's position in the modern world that I thought I knew so well. Through films such as: *Killing Us Softly 3: Advertising's Image of Women* (2000); *Wrestling with Manhood: Boys, Bullying & Battering* (2003); *Mickey Mouse Monopoly: Disney, Childhood and Corporate Power* (2001); and *Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex & Power in Music Video* (2007), to name only a few, the hierarchal relationship between masculinity and femininity that dominated much of the media in my environment, and much of the culture I lived in, became clearer. This

was a pivotal learning experience for me as these films not only highlighted the constructions of power in the media but how they both related to, and reflected, constructions of power within contemporary society.

Founded in 1992, by cultural studies scholar Sut Jhally, the Media Education Foundation is a non-profit organization whose mission is to “produce ... and distribute ... documentary [U.S] films and other educational resources to inspire critical reflection on the social, political, and cultural impact of American mass media” (Jhally mediaed.org). Films produced draw on the latest scholarly research on gender, race, politics, and commercialization and present these issues in a concise, accessible manner for use in high school and university classrooms (Jhally mediaed.org). Although these films often deal with complex cultural issues and analyses, drawn from some of the leading scholars in cultural studies, feminism and education, the *MEF*’s documentary films are designed as an entry point for ordinary students and citizens to discuss the impact media may have on their lives (Jhally mediaed.org). This approach is pivotal to the organization’s mandate, as Jhally, when asked why media education matters states, “media are everywhere in the modern world ... we are influenced by media in a way we don’t even realize anymore ... and if you want to be an aware citizen ... you have to be aware of the environment you live in, and in the modern world, media are that environment” (Jhally mediaed.org).

The Media Education Foundation’s documentaries introduced me to a powerful form of critical analysis, as they referenced some of the most popular slogans, images and figures relevant to my everyday environment, and used these to highlight some of the gender, class, and race inequities still occurring in North America today. Furthermore, I

began to recognize that the media were the sources from which I received much of my social education about what was expected of me as a woman and what others expected from this role as well, and that feminism, and the issues we discussed in the Women's Studies classroom, were not a part of these expectations. It was through analysis of media constructs that I became aware of the nuanced messages about gender in my environment and that these were often contradictory to what I thought I knew to be true about gender and equality. Through popular media, I had learned that issues of equality were resolved, as evident by the independent, sexually savvy female archetype that permeated the magazines I read, the movies I watched, and the advertisements to which I was exposed. I saw that her success was often displayed through opulence and that she had unlimited lifestyle choices equal to those of any man. However, through media education, I learned to investigate the scripts I was presented with and to question the parameters by which women's independence was defined. It was here, in the Women's Studies classroom, that I first learned that the media was a powerful pedagogical tool for both learning and talking about women, about feminism, and about the complexities that these discussions inevitably entailed. In *Undressing Pop Culture: The Workshop*, I hoped to contribute to this conversation.

Project Goals: Techniques and Themes for Rethinking Women's Empowerment

I had several goals in creating this workshop. First and foremost, I wanted to teach participants to critically analyze trends in contemporary media that tie representations of women's empowerment to an ability to be both a desiring and desired heterosexual object. With this in mind, the workshop was divided into four themes, one per week, which highlighted the far reach of such visual and textual representations, as well as

offered participants techniques to analyze them. The themes used to explore this trend included: representations of successful femininity defined by white, heterosexual ideals; sexualization of girls through commercial culture; hierarchal constructs of masculine and feminine sexuality; and the sexualization of female athletes in the name of normative femininity.

I also wanted workshop participants to use concepts of critical media literacy as a way to analyze these representations. With this in mind, I began each workshop by screening a documentary in order to introduce some of the key debates about these media themes. These included: The Media Education Foundation's *The Codes of Gender: Identity and Performance in Pop Culture* (2009); *Dreamworlds Three: Desire, Sex & Power in Music Video* (2007); and *Playing Unfair: The Media Image of the Female Athlete* (2005); as well as, The National Film Board of Canada's (NFB) *Sexy Inc: Our Children Under the Influence* (2007).

Equally important, however, I wanted to encourage a nuanced reading of this media that went beyond mere identification. In order to accomplish this, participants were presented with a corresponding media artefact for further examination, including print advertising in women's magazines; teen and tween¹ media products and icons; music videos and performances; and images of women in sports.

Building on this goal, participants used Share, Jolls and Thoman's five core concepts and corresponding questions as outlined in the Center for Media Literacy's *MediaLit Kit* to examine these artefacts. They include:

¹ The term "tween", according to educators Sharon Lamb and Lyn Mikel Brown, is a marketing construct that consists of an age group between eight and fifteen years. "It is a combination of teen and in-between developed in the 1980s to get kids, primarily girls, to continue buying toys" (5).

1) all media messages are constructed – who created this message? 2) media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules – what techniques are used to attract my attention? 3) different people experience the same media message differently – how might different people understand this message differently from me? 4) media have embedded values and points of view – what lifestyles, values and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message? and 5) most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power – why was this message sent? (Share, Jolls, and Thoman 9)

These questions were an integral part in the workshop and encouraged a more in-depth analysis of media by focusing on the ways in which media are constructed, perpetuated and interpreted.

I also wanted the workshop to take a long view, as participants would still be living in an environment saturated with media long after the workshop had ended. Using Share, Jolls, and Thoman's five key questions and concepts for analyzing media was an integral part of this aim, as these questions are applicable to *any* source of media and constructed to "lead to many other questions which, in turn, open up a lifetime of inquiry that will transform the way students ... negotiate the complex media environment of their generation" (6). Building on this, at the end of each meeting, I provided participants with additional resources for media exploration and analysis. These included: books, websites, and documentaries. (A list of these resources is provided in the toolkit).

Further building on this goal, the final product of this workshop has taken the form of a toolkit that will be added to the *Department of Women's Studies Image Archive*.² It serves as a possible teaching resource for use by Department of Women's Studies faculty and graduate teaching assistants in Women's Studies 1000: Introduction

² As part of a Graduate Assistant position in the fall 2009, I was responsible for creating a visual image bank, a resource for Women's Studies instructors and teaching assistants to use in their classrooms. It is comprised of media and popular culture materials that have been collected by Women's Studies faculty over the last several years.

to Women's Studies. The teaching toolkit contains a summary of the documentaries and information about where to access them, suggested materials for teaching with, and about, media and additional media education resources.

Additionally, I wanted to create an intimate and interactive atmosphere for the duration of the workshop in which all would have a chance to speak and respond to others' opinions, even if there was disagreement. For this reason, I limited the number of participants to eight and stressed my own role as a graduate student and discussion facilitator as opposed to all knowing expert or instructor. I also intentionally chose the Sally Davis Seminar room (SN4087) as a venue for workshop meetings. Comprised of one large conference table, in which participants could face each other, I among them, this type of venue would, I hoped, encourage open-ended discussions and create a collaborative dynamic in which the group could learn from each other's interpretations, questions and comments.

Importantly, this was not a workshop that encouraged censorship or adopted a moralistic view about a perceived harmful media influence in our environment. Educational theorists Cameron White and Trenia Walker state, "it has become quite popular to bemoan the loss of innocence in today's youth and the role that popular culture has played in their demise ... it becomes very easy to lay the blame for our societal ills at the foot of a group of activities that is the major source of entertainment and communication for today's youth" (31). Instead, the workshop provided an opportunity for participants to acknowledge the significant and pleasurable role media play in their contemporary, everyday environment and discuss what media may imply about expected social roles for masculinity and femininity. This did not require a notion that media are

bad, and that its many forms should not be enjoyed. After all, popular media would not be popular if we did not enjoy them. Instead, it was an approach that adhered to what White and Walker have labelled “popular culture studies as critical and postmodern” (22). The theorists define this as a:

combined, self-reflexive approach [which] protect[s] students complex, at times contradictory individual readings of popular culture texts while still exploring the interplay of power, positionality, and subjectivity inherent in the production of those readings ... The purpose [of which is] to allow students to discuss the pleasures of popular culture, while also reading [its] texts from various perspectives. (22-23)

Drawing on this perspective, I wanted to stimulate discussion and create a learning environment that encouraged critical thought about the messages in our everyday environment, particularly surrounding women’s empowerment, media’s influence on these messages, and the social construction of both. My goal was to create a workshop that worked along with participants to explore these issues in a fun, interactive space, as well as to provide a resource that gave others some points of entry into these critical discussions.

Below, I outline the structure of the workshop, the implementation of these goals, participant responses to them and the outcomes of such ambitions. I also discuss the term postfeminism and how and why this concept in particular was used as lens to shape themes explored in the workshop.

Getting Dressed: Structure and Participation for *Undressing Pop Culture: The Workshop*

The workshop occurred once a week for four weeks and participants were undergraduate volunteers who had taken Women’s Studies 1000 in the fall 2009 semester or who were taking this course in the 2010 winter semester. Participants were recruited

through class announcements³ and posters⁴ distributed through the Department of Women's Studies listserv and displayed throughout the Department on bulletin boards and office doors. (See Appendix for a copy of poster.) Participants were notified (on the posters and through class announcements) that I was a Master of Women's Studies student⁵ recruiting volunteers to participate in an interactive media workshop to examine representations of women's empowerment in media. They were also informed that the workshop was a not-for-credit endeavour, would have no bearing on their academic standing and that it would occur outside of scheduled Women's Studies class time. Interested participants were directed to contact me through email or in person, as I made myself available after classes ended to further discuss the workshop.

To my delight, I had an immediate and overwhelming interest in the workshop. I went from worry that nobody would be interested in participating, to a worry that I would have to turn participants away. As per the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research, interested participants were required to sign an informed consent form that explained the workshop, including its duration, expectations and that a teaching resource was an anticipated final outcome. These were emailed to interested participants and I picked them up from them once signed. However, two participants met with me and signed the consent form immediately after I announced the workshop in class.

³ Many thanks to Drs. Jill Allison and Kate Bride for the opportunity to come into their classroom and recruit participants. Also, many thanks to Drs. Boon and Hallet for notifying students in their Women's Studies classes about the workshop.

⁴ Many thanks to David and Scott Keating for creating the design for the posters.

⁵ Some students were already familiar with me as in the winter 2010 semester I was employed as a teaching assistant in a Women's Studies 1000 course.

About a week before the workshop began in February, I had eight confirmed participants. However, the day before it was scheduled to begin, two notified me to say that because of unexpected commitments off campus, they could not attend. In the first workshop, five out of the six expected participants attended, and for the remaining three meetings, the workshop was comprised of three participants. I can only speculate as to why the other participants did not return to the workshop beyond the first meeting. One possible reason may have been due to weather conditions. The workshops were conducted in the winter semester and our first workshop meeting had to be postponed because of a major snowstorm which caused the University to close. This unforeseen and uncontrollable event subsequently pushed all workshop meetings back by one week and perhaps this delay interfered with some participants' schedules. Additionally, all who participated were in their first year of University, and perhaps as the semester went on, demands from their credited courses became stronger and their academic responsibilities out-weighed any commitment to volunteer for a not-for-credit endeavour. However, three participants did attend all workshop meetings on a regular basis. The smaller than anticipated numbers did not hamper discussions as we always met the allotted two hour time period and occasionally ran over schedule.

Since participation was voluntary, with no monetary incentive, and the workshop could not be used as university credit, I wanted to offer some form of appreciation for those who had volunteered their time. I provided light refreshments each week and drew a name at the end of the four weeks to award one person a pair of movie tickets.

The workshop met from 12:00 to 2:00 pm on the last three Fridays in February 2010 and the first Friday in March 2010. A two hour time frame was chosen in order to

allow time to view a documentary (each film had running times ranging from 30 to 54 minutes), have discussion and implement an activity. In addition, as the workshop was comprised of volunteers, who were giving up the limited time they had as busy undergraduate students, I felt two hours once a week was the maximum I could ask of them. Some meetings did run a little over the scheduled two hours, however, and this was due in large part to the discussions that occurred when conducting activities with media materials.

The workshop followed the same structure each week but differed in the themes and media genres explored. In each meeting there was a pre-film discussion which encompassed the first 10-15 minutes of the workshop, a film viewing which ran from 30-54 minutes, a post-film discussion⁶ running from 20-30 minutes, and finally an analysis of a corresponding media item, scheduled for about 20-30 minutes. Some aspects ran longer or shorter than others and adjustments in the schedule were made accordingly. I chose to adhere to this four-part structure for two reasons. First, as discussion facilitator, it helped me to organize our meeting times so as to implement the media literacy techniques – the documentary and five key questions – and allow adequate time for the discussion and analyses within the allotted two hours. Second, I wanted to create a logical progression of analysis, one in which each media literacy technique built on the one before it.

The division of time did not always go as planned, however, and I did have to be flexible and adjust the intended time for each part when necessary. For example, on the

⁶ Participants were thoughtful, forthcoming and articulate in these discussions. Sessions were not recorded.

days our pre-film discussions went beyond the intended 15 minutes, I limited our post-film conversations to a shorter time frame than expected and vice versa. As these aspects of the workshop were based on shared conversation, they were flexible and could be easily adjusted without hindering the progression of the workshop too much, if at all.

Although the times allotted for each step remained flexible, two hours did prove to be an adequate amount of time to incorporate all the parts. Ironically, I attribute this to the smaller than expected attendance. This was actually quite a surprise, as I feared that, because of the smaller number of participants, we would run out of conversation and I would be left scrambling to fill time. In fact, the opposite was true, as we occasionally ran a few minutes over the two hours. This may also be in part attributed to the intimate nature of the group, since it was during the discussions that we often ran over time. During this time, many personal stories about family, friends, and our own our struggles and frustrations with media depictions were shared. Perhaps this type of sharing would not have occurred if the group had been larger.

I also wanted to create a logical progression, one in which each media literacy technique built on the ones developed before it. Pre-film discussions were used to introduce the themes and the documentary. These also provided an opportunity for participants to share their thoughts, pose questions on the theme, and raise questions from the previous week. Viewing the documentary provided an introduction to some key debates surrounding representations of women in the media genre. All films were chosen based on their critical analysis of sexualized feminine identities in the media. These were

an integral part of the workshop structure because I used points from the films, as well as from their accompanying study guides⁷, to structure the post-film discussions.

The post-discussion activities were where the group examined corresponding popular culture items by using the five key concepts and questions as a guide for analysis. The items were: women's fashion magazines spanning from 1953 to 2009; a *Moxie Girl* and *Barbie* doll, as well as two items of girl's clothing: a tee shirt with a slogan – *Hard to Solve, Fun to Handle* and a dress from the *Hannah Montana* clothing line; pop singer Adam Lambert's 2010 *American Music Awards Performance* and subsequent American journalistic media response to it; *Sports Illustrated* depictions of some of the 2010 female Olympic athletes and sports websites such as *TSN* and *ESPN*; and images of South African runner Caster Semenya's makeover. It was here that participants built on the ideas presented in the films, as well as introduced their own ideas. It was also an opportunity to examine why, how and who creates the media, and the motivations behind some of these representations. I wanted to put this as the final step, as it incorporated a more nuanced reading of media, and encouraged participants to draw further connections between constructions of power in media and constructions of power in society by exploring some motivations behind media and how they may be perpetuated and interpreted. Below, I outline the themes participants used to incorporate these ideas.

⁷ Each Media Education Foundation documentary has an accompanying study guide and transcript. These are available on the Foundation's website – www.mediaed.org.

Workshop Themes: Postfeminist Paradoxes of Agency

The themes put forth for analysis in the workshop were drawn on a position that many feminist critics have labelled as postfeminist. The term, originating in 1980s media and becoming solidified in 1990s popular culture, “broadly encompasses a set of assumptions, widely disseminated within popular media forms, having to do with the ‘pastness’ of feminism, whether that supposed ‘pastness’ is merely noted, mourned, or celebrated” (Tasker and Negra 1).

Within feminist scholarship, however, the concept itself remains imprecise and there is little agreement about its significance. Some define it as a deliberate backlash against feminism and women in general (McRobbie; Whelehan), while others suggest it is a continuation of second-wave feminism’s⁸ aims for a new generation that can now be understood as a new form of popular feminism or third-wave feminism⁹ (Wolf, Hollows and Moseley).

The backlash argument, coined by feminist writer Susan Faludi in her 1991 book *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, is based on what she claims is the popular media’s vilification of feminism and feminist aims of the second-wave. She states that “publications from the *New York Times* to *Vanity Fair* ... have issued a steady stream of indictments against the women’s movement ... [t]hey hold the campaign for

⁸ As per Women’s Studies scholars Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, the second-wave may be defined as “a ... social movement [in the 1960’s and 70’s] dedicated to raising consciousness about sexism and patriarchy ... attaining equal rights in political and economic realms ... limited by a universalizing definition of woman that excluded ... many women of colour, working-class women, and lesbians” (242).

⁹ Allyson Mitchell and Lara Karaian state “the third wave attempts to synthesize, build on, and extend what has been accomplished by the first and second wave of feminism, while attending to the particulars of our present moment in historical feminist contexts” (61). Additionally, Grewal and Kaplan state the third-wave focuses “on issues of race and sexuality and fighting the new backlash against feminism” (259).

women's equality responsible for nearly every woe besetting women, from mental depression to ... bad complexions" (xi). The backlash interpretation has endured and has been applied to contemporary analyses of postfeminist media representations. For example, feminist cultural theorist Angela McRobbie builds on this, defining postfeminism as:

an active process by which feminist gains ... come to be undermined [and] that through an array of machinations, elements of contemporary popular culture are perniciously effective in regard to this undoing of feminism while simultaneously appearing to be engaging in a well-informed ... well-intended response to 'feminism'. (27)

However, other scholars (Wolf, Hollows and Moseley) understand the term to represent a continuation of second-wave feminist aims for a new generation which can now be understood as a new form of popular feminism or third-wave feminism. In this interpretation, postfeminism is not equated with anti-feminism, and instead is considered a way to "actively question ... the values of second-wave feminism, [for those who] find it impossible to reconcile the rhetoric and perceived 'rules' of second-wave feminism with ... growing up female and feminist in the 1980s and 1990s" (Hollows and Moseley 8).

However, as Ann Braithwaite in her article "Politics of/and Backlash" argues, definitions that focus on an either/or understanding "are ultimately problematic, especially for current feminist analyses of pop culture. Too often, they end up sharing the assumption that there was-or is-something easily (and continuously) identifiable as 'feminism'" (25).

With this in mind, the workshop was not used to debate one definition's validity over another. Rather, it was used to critically analyse some postfeminist tropes as they

are recycled across a broad scope of media. This approach draws on cultural theorist Rosalind Gill's view that states, "postfeminism should be conceived of as a *sensibility*, and postfeminist media culture should be our *critical object*; the phenomenon which analysts must inquire into and interrogate" ("Gender" 254-255, emphasis in original).

The postfeminist media put forth for analysis took the form of the documentary films and corresponding media products that drew on the tropes identified in feminist scholarly literature on postfeminism. With this in mind, I outline some feminist discussions on the dominant themes in postfeminist media and what they may imply about our culture's understanding of women's empowerment and feminine identities.

Film and television scholars Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra identify a variety of postfeminist tropes that occur across North American media and the contradictory messages about women's liberated position which they promote. They state:

Postfeminist culture works in part to incorporate, assume, or naturalize aspects of feminism; crucially, it also works to commodify feminism via the figure of woman as empowered consumer. Thus, postfeminist culture emphasizes educational and professional opportunities for women and girls; freedom of choice with respect to work, domesticity, and parenting; physical and particularly sexual empowerment...[I]t is white and middle class by default, anchored in consumption as a strategy (and leisure as a site) for the production of the self. It is thus also a strategy by which other kinds of social difference are glossed over. (1-2)

While these themes draw on rhetoric of equality, and freedom of choice with respect to education, career and child rearing options for women, and use these as evidence of the liberated position some women hold in society, postfeminist declarations of equality are framed within an essentialized feminine model. Tasker and Negra point out, "one of postfeminism's signature discursive formulations couches the celebration of female achievement (whether on the playing field, in the concert arena, or in the board room)

within traditionalist ideological rubrics” (7). One of the most distinctive characteristics in media considered postfeminist then, is that women are presented as free agents, with unlimited opportunities to achieve and pursue a variety of endeavours for success. Equally distinctive however, it is only a select group of women offered these choices, and the options are intrinsically linked to an essentialized feminine ideology defined by a beautified, hyper-sexualized, heteronormative model. The empowered woman is renowned in postfeminist media, through considerable representation of independent, savvy, leading female archetypes across a multitude of genres. For example, we see these characters in television (think HBO’s *Sex & the City*), in music (think Black Eyed Peas singer Fergie) and in film (think Angelina Jolie in the *Laura Croft: Tomb Raider* franchise) to name only a few. However, it is not a lack of media representation of self-reliant female characters that is the issue; it is how their empowered positions are presented, or rather the parameters by which their power is defined. Media and cultural studies professor Martin Roberts speaks to this as one of the dominating aspects of postfeminist media. He states that postfeminism “construct[s] a logic in which ‘empowerment’ ... is shown as dependent on self-confidence and sexual attractiveness” (229). This trope in particular provides rich text from which to draw because of its intersection with a variety of postfeminist themes that define women’s empowerment as middle class, white, and heterosexual. Additionally, these themes aid in promoting what educator Jessica Ringrose has identified as “successful femininity”. Ringrose refers to this as a “highly contradictory subject location ... where girls, [and I argue adult women as well] are expected to be both bright and beautiful, hetero-feminine/desirable ... aggressor and nurturer” (485). With this in mind, the workshop was used to examine media

representations that equate successful feminine identities with an ability to be a heterosexually desirable and desiring object.

This trend in particular is what many media and feminist critics have identified as a shift towards a mainstreaming of pornography and a sexualization of our culture in general (McNair; Levy; Gill). This enduring representation, identified as “porno-chic”, or the “pornographication of the mainstream”, is “not [considered] porn, [...] but the *representation* of porn in non-pornographic art and culture” (McNair 61). In fact, it is the mainstream promotion and apparent societal acceptance of such messages that has come under scrutiny by many critics. Gill, in reference to advertisements states, “arched backs, exposed breasts and simulated orgasms are so routine as to rarely provoke comment. Porn chic has become a taken-for-granted mode of representation in a context in which advertisers believe they have to produce ever more arresting and stimulating images to get consumers’ attention in the crowded, sign-saturated mediascape” (“Supersexualize” 94). Postfeminist media have played an intrinsic role in the promotion and perpetuation of such representations through an embrace of a hetero-sexual, hyper-sexualized female archetype as an all-powerful one. It is a likeness that has been commodified, essentialized, and used as motivation for many women to participate in a westernized beauty culture. Gill states,

in today’s media it is possession of a ‘sexy body’ that is presented as women’s key (if not sole) source of identity. The body is presented simultaneously as women’s source of power *and* as always already unruly and requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodelling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever narrower judgements of female attractiveness. (“Gender” 255, emphasis in original)

This theme is particularly ubiquitous in North American media. It has been recycled through a billion-dollar cosmetic industry with slogans that direct women to “be-hot-be a better you” (GNC WELLbeING), popular women’s magazines that consistently promote an array of direction on “The Dos & Don’ts of Looking Hot” (Marshall 98) and even a children’s doll line, in which the female figurines¹⁰ are boy-crazed teenagers, dressed in leather mini-skirts, fishnet stockings and stiletto boots. The combined effect of such themes equates agency for both girls and women with their ability to be heterosexually seductive and desirable.

The promotion of this type of agency is further compounded by some women’s embrace and endorsement of these themes. This embrace is another trope in postfeminist media, in which “women are not straightforwardly objectified but are presented as active, desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so” (Gill 258). For instance, Evans, Riley and Shankar provide examples that include: “burlesque, and pole-dancing classes; ... porno-chic fashion styles of the ‘Porn Star’ type T-shirts and G-Strings ... [and] images of ‘empowered’, sexually assertive lingerie models on billboards and in the pages of women’s magazines” (115). Although these were once considered representations created for an objectified male gaze, indicative of a gendered hierarchy in which the male viewpoint is dominant, (Code; Thornham) in contemporary postfeminist media, these representations indicate a different viewpoint, one in which the female gaze is dominant, through women’s choice to present themselves to be gazed upon. Although often promoted as a contemporary form of agency in this context, in direct response to previous

¹⁰ MGM Entertainment’s *Bratz* doll line provides an apt example of this image. <http://www.bratz.com/>

models of passive femininity where women had little say in their representation, Gill points to the limitations of this shift. She states that this allegiance may be even more damaging to women's social status, as it creates a new, "narcissistic gaze" and suggests "a higher or deeper form of exploitation than objectification – one in which the objectifying male gaze is internalized to form a new disciplinary regime ... [that] constructs our very subjectivity" ("Gender" 258).

However, some third-wave feminists consider women's sexual expression as part of a contemporary definition of agency. This is particularly evident through the creation of alternative pornography and the work of some third-wave feminist activist groups in which women use their sexuality to resist patriarchal norms (Mitchell and Karaian 70-71). Groups such as *Pretty Porky and Pissed Off* for example, "publicly def[y] stereotypes of fat women as incapable of being fashionable, sexy, smart, or active" through cultural production and performance art (Mitchell and Karaian 71). This definition of agency is what Hanne Blank calls a "pro-sex response to the heteropatriarchal norm that discourages women's active sexuality" (quoted in Mitchell and Karaian 75). There are some differences between representations of sexual agency in the context of postfeminist media and those put forth by third-wave activist groups. In the context of postfeminism, women's sexual agency, largely defined through compliance with essentialized social norms surrounding feminine beauty practices, is identifiable through its exclusion of "those who are not young, white, heterosexual or otherwise conforming to a narrow, globalized conceptualization of female beauty" (Evans, Riley and Shankar 15). This is in direct opposition to groups such as *Pretty Porky and Pissed Off*, whose aim is to educate and advocate for size acceptance in our society and examine how representations of

women's bodies may be further complicated by race, class, gendered, and (dis)abled identities (Mitchell and Karaian 71).

It is important to note however, that sexualized representations in the context of postfeminism may also be interpreted by some as a legitimate and necessary expression of female empowerment. This type of position may be referred to as "do-me feminism", a feminist stance which cultural theorists Stephanie Genz and Benjamin Brabon say "focuses on sexuality as a means to attain freedom and power" (92). They further explain "[d]o-me feminists want to distance themselves from feminist positions that have been deemed 'anti-sex' by celebrating the pleasures of feminine adornment and sexuality" (92). This position is largely in response to the sex or pornography wars of the 1980s and 1990s in which there were strong divisions between sex-positive feminist analyses of women's sexual representations and sex-critical ones (Showden; Genz and Brabon).

Feminist theorist Carisa Showden elaborates on this stating,

the debate was primarily over the regulation of pornography and the question of whether legal interventions were more likely to ameliorate harms to women or aggravate them by stigmatizing sexual nonconformists and women's own sexual explorations, making sweeping and harmful judgments about "good" and "bad" sex. In contrast, [...] "sex-positive" feminists argued that the "market" should be kept as open as possible to allow multiple views of women and their sexuality to flourish, fighting images some women dislike with images and ideas that they want to encourage. (5)

The many feminist debates about whether women's sexual representation in the media is an empowering or oppressive position open up the complexity of other possible readings of postfeminism that go beyond many of the white, heterosexual, essentialized feminine ideas so rampant in its media representations. However, what is most compelling about

the term and its themes are not the potential resolutions surrounding these debates, but the debates themselves.

Whether one defines postfeminist representation as a sex-positive stance or as one that ascribes to an essentialized model of femininity based on white, heteronormative ideals, there are distinct overlaps between “porno-chic” (McNair 61) and postfeminist media. When the two are examined in the context of each other it becomes evident that postfeminism’s promotion of the sexualized woman as a model of female power contributes to an apparent cultural acceptance that defines successful femininity through a woman’s ability to be a desired and desiring heterosexual object. This leaves little room to recognize the potential limitations of such an endorsement, as it relegates women’s success within a “traditional ideological rubric” (Tasker and Negra) that defines the female identity within heteronormative, hyper-sexualized ideals. This is not to imply that the women who ascribe to these messages are cultural dupes, incapable of deciphering harmful media messages from affecting their lives in an oppressive way. It is to say, however, that in a media-saturated society in which women are told to define their empowerment through sexuality, and repeatedly shown how to accomplish this, through advertisements, television, and cosmetics, through film, billboards and books, it may become difficult to defy these messages. Feminist media critic Elana Levine refers to this as postfeminist hegemony, a concept in which discourses of postfeminism have become “naturalized into a kind of common sense that is especially difficult to resist” (376). As a result, social expectations may be created in which men and women understand the sexualized body, and a woman’s ability to use her body to be heterosexually seductive, as a primary symbol of female identity and agency. With this in mind, I used the workshop

to highlight and critically analyse depictions of women's sexuality, and the postfeminist themes presented to the group opened up their limitations to interrogation.

Visual Culture as a Pedagogical Tool

Visual media have proven an effective pedagogical tool in the Women's Studies' classroom and are particularly relevant when exploring issues of postfeminism. Women's Studies professors Meredith Love and Brenda Helmbrecht speak to this in reference to their efforts to engage students with feminist issues in their courses. They state: "[w]e believe that popular texts, like film, music, and advertising, need to be brought into a classroom where they can be scrutinized, questioned, and studied through ... lenses that highlight the postfeminist agenda [so students can] see the transformations that are still necessary" (48).

With this in mind, the documentary films were an integral part of the workshop. Although none identified the term postfeminism as a theoretical base for their arguments, the media themes to which they alluded highlighted many postfeminist themes. Each documentary analysed sexualized female identities in media and also explored how these may be further complicated by class, race, and sexuality. Additionally, by choosing documentary films that examined a variety of media genres, I hoped to have participants recognize the broad reach postfeminist tropes may have in their contemporary environment. This is an integral component in any analysis of postfeminist media as Tasker and Negra state, "postfeminism does not always offer a logically coherent account of gender and power, but through structures of forceful articulation and synergistic reiteration across media forms it has emerged as a dominating discursive system" (2). However, as the group only met once a week for four weeks, I could not possibly present

all of the representations of women's sexuality in postfeminist media and there could be no definitive complete visual analysis of women's sexuality. This is further compounded by a vast and rapidly evolving media, in which new representations and technology are produced on a continual basis.

Additionally, the selection of documentary films was limited by availability. The *MEF* Documentaries were borrowed from the QEII library and the Curriculum Materials Center on Memorial University's campus and the *NFB*'s documentary¹¹ was borrowed from the A.C Hunter Adult Library in the Arts and Culture Center in St. John's. This, at times, proved to be a challenge. As a graduate student, I was not permitted to reserve any films at the QEII and, as a result, my access to them was based on whether anyone else had borrowed them or whether a professor had put them on reserve for use by their class. I was, however, granted reserve privileges at the Curriculum Materials Center, and *Sexy Inc. Our Children under the Influence* was readily available at the AC. Hunter Library and not necessary to reserve.

Although the documentaries were chosen based on their critique of the sexualization of women in the media, I could neither predict, nor control, how participants would respond to them. The arguments presented in the documentaries were compelling and provided insight into the media's construction and perpetuation of gendered, racialized and sexualized identities. However, these documentary films are also products of media, and, as such, they have been constructed with a creative language to attract the viewers' attention, are value laden and present specific points of view, are created for a purpose, and may be interpreted differently by different people (Share, Jolls,

¹¹ This documentary is also available online at http://www.nfb.ca/film/sexy_inc/.

and Thoman 9). Although the *MEF*'s stated purpose is to educate and offer critique of some of the media's "subtle, yet widespread effects of ... pop-cultural misogyny and sexism ... to [media displays of] rapacious consumerism and the wars of oil", (*Media Education Foundation* mediaed.org) their documentaries can offer only one point of view on any given matter. It is a viewpoint that has been carefully produced, edited and marketed to present a specific analysis in the most compelling way possible. With this in mind, Share, Jolls and Thoman's five core concepts and five key questions could have been applied to the documentary films in the same manner in which they were used to investigate other media presented in the workshop. Although these films offer critiques of media representation they are also cultural texts and cannot be immune from questions of authorship, format, audience interpretation and purpose¹² (Share, Jolls, and Thoman 9). However, because of the limited time I had with participants, I could not incorporate an analysis of the documentary films along with analysis of the other media images and products without diminishing the depth of critique I wished to encourage on postfeminist themes. I had to make choices about which themes, media genres, products, and activities to focus on in the workshop, and many of these decisions were made in the name of practicality. This is not to say however, that I expected participants to take the arguments presented in the documentary films verbatim. With this in mind, I always emphasised to participants that it was okay to disagree with the arguments presented in the documentaries, with me and with each other. For this reason as well, I did not aim to garner one correct or incorrect response to the documentary film's messages and the questions they posed. Rather, I wanted to offer participants the tools to question the ways

¹² Many thanks to Dr. Ann Braithwaite for this insight.

women's empowerment was depicted in postfeminist media through an examination of the various media genres it embodied, and through its intersection, or lack thereof, with other social identities such as class, race, and sexuality. As facilitator then, my role was to pose questions that encouraged open-ended discussion and debate. Many of the questions posed were drawn primarily from the accompanying transcripts and study guides, and as they were constructed to work with the documentaries, these, too, could not be value neutral. However, the guides still proved an effective resource, as active discussion and debate occurred both in response to the films and to the questions I posed. To this end, adding the additional step of examining media products and applying Share, Jolls, and Thoman's key questions was beneficial as these questions and concepts often balanced the biased view presented in the documentary films and study guides. Below I outline a week-by-week description and analysis of the discussions, documentary films, and activities that occurred during *Undressing Pop Culture: The Workshop*.

Dressing Down: A Week-by-Week Analysis

Week 1: "Ads are Us"

Themes: Heteronormativity, Whiteness, Beauty, Normative Femininity and Masculinity

Documentary: Media Education Foundation's *The Codes of Gender: Identity and Performance in Pop Culture* (2009); 46 minutes (Abridged Version)

Media Products: Women's fashion magazines spanning from 1953 to 2009

In this first meeting, participants examined advertisements in women's fashion magazines. Participants were asked to consider the ways in which masculinity and femininity have been constructed in advertisements to reflect a hierarchal division of gender that often equates femininity with submissiveness and masculinity with dominance. Additionally, participants also considered representations of successful femininity as defined by white, heterosexual ideals. *The Codes of Gender: Identity and Performance in Pop Culture* (2009) examined these hierarchal divisions while also emphasizing that gender is a social construction and not a biological determination.

This documentary film provided rich text from which to draw for the workshop. Based on ideas in Erving Goffman's¹³ innovative analysis of masculinity and femininity in advertising, it provided numerous examples of contemporary images to personify how gendered cues, in the form of eye contact, body position and hand gestures construct masculinity and femininity in advertisements. However, as the workshop was comprised of volunteers who were currently enrolled in, or had already completed an introductory

¹³ Erving Goffman, an anthropologist was most notable for 1969's "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" and 1978's "Gender Advertisements" which offers an analysis of gender and power in advertisements. The latter is the basis for the arguments presented in *The Codes of Gender: Identity and Performance in Pop Culture* (Jhally 2).

Women's Studies course, the concept of gender as a social construction was an idea with which participants were already quite familiar. I learned this upon asking the participants if there were any points in the documentary they had not considered before now or if there was anything that surprised them. More importantly however, participants considered what role the media plays in both the reflection and construction of these messages as normative or natural occurrences. This was a pivotal point, which I deliberately established in the first workshop. I wanted participants to be able to identify the pervasiveness of images that associate femininity with passivity and masculinity with dominance, both in that day's workshop, and in the weeks that followed. In this respect, the choice to screen *The Codes of Gender* in the first of our four meetings was a success. This was an effective documentary that highlighted these representations through a number of contemporary advertisements and demonstrated how these messages have endured over time. Although the film did not necessarily introduce participants to new concepts regarding gender as a social construct, it did provide useful techniques to identify the nuanced codes of masculinity and femininity in media that are often taken for granted in everyday encounters with visual media culture. Examples of these gender codes include, women lying down, off-balance, leaning to one side indicating vulnerability, or emotionally vulnerable women shown biting their lip or in infantilized poses with fingers in their mouths (Jhally 9). Participants considered how the saturation of these images in media may contribute to our expectations, not only of how male or female gender should look, but how successful masculinity and femininity are expected to be performed.

Building on this, participants were separated into groups and asked to examine women's magazine advertisements spanning from 1953 to 2009 in order to identify gender codes and to consider Share, Jolls and Thoman's key question, "what lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from these messages?"(9). Furthermore, participants were asked to consider if, or how, the codes and/or values might have evolved over time. Participants responded well to this exercise. Conversation was lively and all shared their insights on their respective advertisements. They concluded that the passive femininity identified in the documentary was prominent in a great deal of the advertisements they examined and had not evolved considerably over time. Additionally, they noted that many of the advertised products in the magazines from 1953—2009 had evolved from predominant representations of household items to personal care and beauty items. Based on these images, they noted that even though expectations about women's place in a domestic sphere had evolved, many of the gender codes of passivity had remained consistent.

Building on an additional aspect of this question – "what lifestyles, values and points of view are ... omitted from this message?" (Share, Jolls, and Thoman 9), participants identified a lack of gay representation and racial diversity in these advertisements and learned that what and who are omitted from these images is as telling as what and who are represented. For example, participants noted an overrepresentation of white men and women in comparison with representations of African-American/Canadian, or Asian populations. Building on this, participants considered questions such as; what does it mean when most of the images predominantly represent whiteness? What might this imply, not only about the magazine publication, but larger

societal expectations of successful femininity and masculinity? Additionally, participants considered the limited representations of gay and lesbian men and women, and noted that most of the advertisements they examined depicted heterosexual relationships and provided advice on how to achieve fulfilment in these unions. They also considered if the magazine's intended audience reflected the exclusion of gay and lesbian lifestyles.

In an effort to bring the focus of the analysis specifically to postfeminist tropes of sexualized empowerment, I provided a 2009 advertisement (figure 1) for a women's exercise enhancement product.



Figure 1. Two page advertisement for a women's nutritional supplement – GNC WELLbeING as it appears in a 2009 *Glamour* Magazine.

Upon first glance, this advertisement appears to challenge the passivity identified in *The Codes of Gender: Identity and Performance in Pop Culture*, as the model's face in the right-hand image is stern in concentration and she is actively practicing kick boxers' moves. However, feminine passivity and sexuality are also major components of this image as evident in the very name of the product – "be-Hot" and the accompanying tagline – "be a better you", as well as the accompanying images on the left-hand side of

women in the passive poses identified in the documentary film (fingers in mouth, lying down). With this in mind, I wanted participants to consider Share, Jolls and Thoman's key concept – "media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules" (9) and to consider how creative techniques such as colour and text worked together with the image(s) to portray certain values and expectations surrounding women's empowerment. Participants discussed the parameters by which power is defined for women in this advertisement and how, or if, this may impact audience ideas about successful femininity. Some participants concluded that those who saw this product in a beauty magazine, versus those who saw it in a sports magazine, may interpret its messages differently. They reasoned it may be empowering for those interested in fitness, and limiting for those only interested in fitting particular beauty norms.

I intentionally chose this advertisement based on its relevance to a postfeminist paradoxical empowerment model that framed women's agency within the passive feminine codes identified in the documentary. However, participants did not necessarily recognize this or interpret it in this way. This did not prove problematic though, as I was not looking for a correct or incorrect response to the questions, or messages under examination. More important to me, participants used these materials – the film and the advertisements, to successfully engage with some of Share, Jolls and Thoman's core concepts and key questions as a method for examining these particular images. They also used techniques identified in the documentary as a way of critically analyzing assumptions displayed in advertising media that define successful femininity through white, heterosexual, hyper-sexual models.

Week 2: "Is that what Little Girls are Made of?"

Themes: Sexualization of girls through media and commercialism

Documentary: The National Film Board of Canada's *Sexy Inc. Our Children under the Influence*; 2007; 36 minutes

Media Products: Tween/teen clothes, dolls

In week two, the group examined sexualized messages in tween and teen media. Drawing on themes presented in The NFB's 2007 documentary film: *Sexy Inc. Our Children under the Influence*, directed by Sophie Bissonnette, participants examined some of the ways in which media aimed at this age group have become increasingly sexualized and commodified.

This documentary film emphasized several tropes of postfeminist media, that sexuality is necessary for success, and that in today's media, women and girls are encouraged to find value through their ability to fit into hyper-sexualized, heterosexual models, by purchasing eroticized clothes, dolls, and make-up made just for them. Film studies scholar Diane Negra points out that "postfeminism has accelerated the consumerist maturity of girls, carving out demographic categories such as that of tween" (47). Building on this idea, participants discussed the wide scope of hyper-sexualized messages and their saturation in both adult and children's markets. They debated the potential implications of media messages that equate sexiness for girls and women with their self-value, and they also considered the monetary value this particular market has for the media conglomerates that create these messages.

Much participant discussion was based on a definition of sexualization provided in the documentary film's facilitation guide. In the guide, which draws on The American

Psychological Association's (APA) *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Young Girls*, sexualization is defined in part as when "a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics" (4). With this in mind, participants were presented with a variety of media products (see figures 2. 3. 4. 5.) that reflected what educators Sharon Lamb and Lyn Mikel Brown have identified as a handful of "girl" identities, that, they suggest are currently dominating the market (52). The authors identify these as "sexy innocent, sexy diva princess, and sexy feisty girl" (52). In order to analyze these identities, participants built on the previous week's techniques of analysis, and used Share, Jolls and Thoman's five key questions to discuss potential implications of these items for those who interacted with them. Participants considered "what techniques are used to attract my attention?" (Share, Jolls and Thoman 9), noting the bright pink colours and also how placement of these products on lower shelving in the stores may attract younger buyers. They also considered "what values, lifestyles, and points of view, are represented in, or omitted from these messages?" (Share, Jolls and Thoman 9), noting that sexiness, and many of the white beauty norms identified in the previous week were a major theme in all items presented for examination. Additionally, participants discussed possible interpretations of these messages, based on how they may interpret them as adults and how the intended audience, predominantly tweens, may interpret them. Participants also discussed whether these products encouraged girls to be active or passive and if they reflected the passive feminine models identified in week one's documentary film, *The Codes of Gender: Identity and Performance in Pop Culture*.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.

Figures 2.3.4.5. Products analyzed in the workshop; left to right: *Moxie Girlz Doll*; *Barbie Basics Collector's Edition Doll*; *Hannah Montana* dress; Adolescent's t-shirt (Author's Photographs).

A portion of the discussion also focused on issues of authorship and what impact these may have on the construction of sexualized feminine identities in the media. Educational theorists Michelle Stack and Deirdre M. Kelly suggest “the majority of what we read, listen to, and watch is owned by a cartel of five giant media conglomerates: Time Warner, Disney, Murdoch’s News corporation, Bertelsmann of Germany, and Viacom” (Badgikian, quoted in Stack and Kelly 8). With this in mind, participants considered Share, Jolls, and Thoman’s key question “who created this message?”(9) and referenced handouts, which I provided, that listed what media each of the above mentioned corporations owned¹⁴ in order to explore this question. Participants considered issues of corporate power and how many of these corporate mergers “offer a massive opportunity for cross promotions and selling of talent and products among different companies owned by the same powerful parent corporation” (*Frontline pbs.org*). For example, The Walt Disney Corporation, beyond the obvious acquisitions of Walt Disney Pictures and all the products that contain Disney’s iconic logos and images, also owns the

¹⁴ For a detailed list of these conglomerates and what they own, see *The Columbia Journalism Review* website: <http://www.cjr.org/resources/index.php>

American network *ABC*, as well as 80% of the American Sports Network *ESPN*, in addition to numerous radio stations, record companies, publishing enterprises, magazines, parks and resorts (Columbia Journalism Review *cjr.org*). Building on this, participants considered Share, Jolls and Thoman's core concept "most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power" (9) and discussed the impact that a media monopoly, such as Disney's, may have on the dominance of a particular mode of femininity as represented in many of the 'tween' products examined that day.

Week two was, perhaps the most successful of all the workshops. Discussion was lively and ran well over the time I had allotted for that portion of the workshop. I attribute this in part to the film itself, which was concise, had a specific theme and focus, and a short running time of thirty-six minutes. Additionally, bringing products for examination was also received quite well, and participants appeared energized and excited to examine them using Share, Jolls, and Thoman's five key questions and concepts. Using these questions proved an engaging and effective way to explore the themes in *Sexy Inc. Our Children under the Influence*. Participants identified some societal expectations of girls, femininity, and agency through messages promoted in a variety of media products while building on the previous week's analysis.

The workshop's success may also be due in part to what education and media specialist Dorothy G. Singer identifies as the third-person effect, in which "people routinely report that others are more strongly influenced by the mass media than they themselves are" (10). This is not a negative observation however. Participants readily offered instances of the media's impact on their own outlooks; however, because the focus was on an age group of 10-15 years, significantly younger than those who

participated, it may have been easier for participants to provide additional perspectives on a media genre designed for a group other than themselves.

Week 3: "The Impossible Dream"

Themes: Hierarchal constructs of sexuality in music video; Homosexuality; Heteronormativity

Documentary: Media Education Foundation's *Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex and Power in Music Video* (2007); 54 minutes

Media Products: Images of Adam Lambert's live performance on the American Music Awards; *Youtube* video of an interview with Lambert regarding the backlash against the performance

In week three, *Dreamworlds 3 Desire, Sex and Power in Music Video* was screened and participants examined constructions of power through sexuality in music videos. This documentary film built on many of the themes identified in *Sexy Inc. Our Children under the Influence*, except its focus was on adult sexuality and its construction, portrayal, and promotion in music video. The documentary juxtaposes masculine and feminine depictions of sexuality, and race, in this genre. Additionally, it also identifies how many women are often portrayed within a hyper-sexualized model in music videos by male artists and how many female artists portray themselves within a similar model in order to become successful entertainers.

At fifty-four minutes, *Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex and Power in Music Video* was the longest of the four documentary films, and there was a great deal of information to take in. While the information was organized and logical, there may have been too many topics to consider in just one meeting. For example, themes presented in the film included: the construction of masculine and feminine power; race; pornography; common filming techniques; female musical artists; violence; and heteronormativity. The

documentary film emphasized many tropes in postfeminist media – the “narcissistic gaze” to which Gill speaks (“Gender” 258), as well as the idea that hyper-sexuality is an essential component to feminine identities. However, because of its length and many tropes, I could not address every issue the documentary film presented. With this in mind, I chose to focus on themes of heteronormativity as this is a prominent trope in postfeminism, and because it was a theme that intersected with other tropes in the film such as pornography and power. Additionally, participants identified a lack of gay representation in the media they examined in week one and I wanted to give them an opportunity to explore this further.

Building on this, participants were asked to consider pop singer Adam Lambert’s performance on the American Music Awards in November 2009 (figure 6). Lambert, an openly gay performer, mimicked sexual acts on the live telecast with another male band member. As a result, the American program *Good Morning America* cancelled the singers scheduled performance stating “we were concerned about airing a similar concert so early in the morning” (Herrera billboard.com).



Figure. 6. Lambert’s live performance on the American Music Awards; Herrera, Monica. “Adam Lambert’s ‘GMA’ Performance Cancelled Over AMAs Flap.” *billboard.com*. Billboard Magazine. 24 November 2009. Web. 22 February 2010.

In their analysis, participants were asked to take into consideration Sut Jhally's assertion that the story we are repeatedly shown in music videos and mass media in general is based on a "male, heterosexual, pornographic imagination" and as a result, there is little to no representation of male homosexuality (7). Based on this assertion, participants considered the controversy Lambert's performance evoked and also analyzed an interview the singer gave about his performance and subsequent cancellation of another performance. Building on techniques used in previous weeks, such as Share, Jolls, and Thoman's concept "media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules" (9), participants considered how creative techniques, such as text,¹⁵ worked together with the televised interview to portray certain values and expectations surrounding homosexuality and heteronormativity. This was an opportunity for participants to consider how Lambert's portrayal, and the media response to it, may or may not challenge the parameters of the "heterosexual, pornographic imagination" (7) which Jhally identified. Building on this, participants juxtaposed the backlash against Lambert's performance with the apparent acceptance of a similar performance by Madonna, Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera in a 2003 performance on the American network MTV (figure 7). In doing so, they considered another question put forth in the documentary film, "whose story is being told?" (Jhally 7) in these music videos and, based on this, what might this tell us about the way in which masculinity, femininity and sexuality are portrayed and expected to be performed in our society? Participants concluded that homosexuality was accepted in mainstream media only as performed by

¹⁵ The words "Straight Talk" appeared at the bottom of the screen for most of the interview. To access the complete interview go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNYG4Rura6M> (Lambert youtube.com).

women who publicly identified as heterosexual and who fit cultural expectations of beauty constructed for a male gaze.



Figure 7. Brittney Spears and Madonna performing on a 2003 *MTV Awards Show*; Hancock, David. "More on the Britney –Madonna kiss!" *cbsnews.com*. CBS News Entertainment. 5 September 2003. Web. 22 February 2010.

While *Dreamworlds 3, Desire Sex and Power in Music Video* was considerably long, it proved a powerful documentary that provoked much discussion and debate about portrayals, not only of women in music, but of sexuality. Participants responded positively to the film and could readily apply its themes to the analysis of recent of media events. To my delight, one participant approached me outside of our meeting time to inform me that she viewed music videos much differently since seeing the documentary film and had been applying what she learned in the workshop to videos she watched at home!

However, because of the length of the documentary and its many tropes, I could not offer an in-depth analysis of all its themes. As a result, an important discussion on racial depictions did not occur in any depth, even though considerable analysis was included in the documentary. Additionally, as psychologist and racial identity researcher, Beverley Tatum asserts, race is often considered a taboo subject “that most students, regardless of their class and ethnic background still find ... a difficult topic to discuss”

(392-393). Whether participants felt uncomfortable talking about issues of race, I cannot say for sure. They did not take the conversation to this subject, and I, as facilitator, did not insist that they discuss this topic. This was in part due to a lack of time, but it may have been due to the fact that all who participated, myself included, were not visible minorities, and, as such, we would come into this discussion from a position of relative privilege. Women's Studies professor, Anne Donadey suggests that this may contribute to student resistance to incorporating discussions of race in the classroom. She speculates that "guilt, anger, shame, defensiveness, and denial" may all contribute to the difficulty of such an analysis, especially for those who come from white, middle-class backgrounds (90).

Tatum offers guidelines to help facilitate conversations about race and ease some tensions that may occur. These include: agreement among the class to honour confidentiality so students feel free to ask potentially embarrassing questions and share their own experiences; a discouragement of 'put downs' even in the name of comic relief, which Tatum suggests tend to happen when students feel anxious about the topic; and a request that students speak from their own experiences, with phrases such as "in my experience" rather than generalizations such as "people say" (392). Although Tatum's suggestions may be beneficial, it is difficult to predict or control what persons may say in reference to this topic, or how others may react to their assertions. Although a "climate of safety" (Tatum 392) based on these guidelines is one possible outcome, there can be no guarantees. For example, participants may agree to maintain confidentiality, however, once outside of the setting in which they established such a guideline, they are not obligated to adhere to it. Perhaps a discussion about race, and its intersection with other

social constructs such as gender, may have been best served over the course of several meetings. This would allow for an in-depth discussion not only about the portrayal of race in the media, but its integration with representations of consumerism and sexualization.

I had an additional activity planned, in which participants were to use techniques identified in the documentary to analyze a music video which I would provide. This analysis would have given participants an opportunity to examine some of the specific camera angles used in music videos and to consider “the way in which women are filmed, not simply what they are doing or wearing, communicates messages and ideas about them”(Jhally 9). Nonetheless, I recommend this film for use, as it addresses many of Share, Jolls and Thoman’s core concepts in its themes: such as; authorship – questioning who creates these videos; format – such as filming techniques; content – such as the dominant values represented in the videos; as well as audience – exploring how different people may interpret music video images. However, because of the rich content in this documentary film, it may have been more beneficial to explore its many themes over several meetings.

Week 4: "It's How You Play the Game?"

Themes: Media coverage of women in sports; sexualization of female athletes; normative femininity; homosexuality

Documentary: Media Education Foundation's *Playing Unfair: The Media Image of the Female Athlete*; 2002; 30 minutes

Media Products: Sports news websites – *TSN*, *ESPN*, and *Sports Illustrated*; Images of female Olympic Athletes as portrayed on the *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit 2010* webpage; and an image of Caster Semenya's makeover.

In the final week participants examined media coverage of women in professionalized sports and explored the sexualization of female athletes through their portrayals within hyper-sexualized, heteronormative models. Drawing on themes presented in *Playing Unfair: The Media Image of the Female Athlete*, participants considered why some media choose to promote active, strong and competitive women, within essentialized models of femininity (Tasker and Negra 7) that link their athleticism to their sexual desirability. This documentary highlights many tropes in postfeminist media. For example, it illustrates that there is a great deal of value placed in women's ability to be (hetero)sexually alluring, and that this ability is a necessary component of female success, even if success has been attained through achievement in sports. The documentary film used three themes to situate these issues; the limited coverage of female sports in the media; the sexualized promotion of female athletes outside of their sport; and homophobia in sports. With this in mind, participants examined sports news websites, images of female athletes as they posed for *Sports Illustrated's Swimsuit 2010: Olympic Stars* pictorial, as well as Caster Semenya, a South African track and field

athlete, who “was ordered to undergo sex-verification tests during ... [the] World Athletics Championships” in 2009 (Yaniv nydailynews.com).

Using my own laptop, and projecting its image on a screen in the Sally Davis Seminar room, participants examined the top pages for *TSN*, a Canadian sports media website, as well as *ESPN*, and *Sports Illustrated*, both American sports media websites. In their examination, participants considered an assertion put forth in the documentary film, that if the average viewer just relied on sports media, they may conclude “that women simply aren’t participating in sports in the numbers that they are” (Kane 4). With this in mind, participants considered Share, Jolls and Thoman’s key question “who created this message?”(9) and noted not only that male sports received significantly more coverage compared to female sports, but also that the bloggers and columnists identified on the webpages were predominantly male. Based on this, participants debated whether more female columnists and bloggers would shift the focus to include more female sports coverage. Additionally, drawing on discussions surrounding media conglomerates in week two, participants considered issues of ownership and cross promotion, noting that Disney, for example, was part owner of *ESPN* and that the *Sports Illustrated* website, *SI.com*, contained advertisements for *ABC* programming, a network also owned by The Walt Disney Company.

Further building on these ideas, participants examined media in which coverage of female athletes was dominant. Using images from *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit 2010: Olympic Stars* webpage, participants examined some of the female Winter 2010 Olympic competitors as they were promoted on this website (figures 8. 9. 10.).



Figure 8.

Figure 9.

Figure 10.

Figure(s) 8. 9. 10. From left to right; Olympic snowboarder, Clair Bidez; Olympic skier, Lacy Schnoor; Olympic skier, Lindsey Vonn; as depicted on the *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit 2010: Olympic Stars* webpage; *Swimsuit 2010: Olympic Stars*. Sports Illustrated, nd. Web. 1 March 2010.

Taking into consideration kinesiology professor's Mary Jo Kane's statement, "sport is all about physical, emotional, and mental empowerment" (6), I asked participants to identify some traits, physical or otherwise, which they felt any successful athlete should possess, regardless of gender. Participants cited attributes such as: well-defined muscles, dexterity, will-power, and focus, to name only a few, and then considered whether these characteristics were emphasized in the images of Bidez, Schnoor and Vonn on *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit 2010: Olympic Stars* webpage (figures 8. 9. 10.). Some identified that the athletes' muscular strength was personified, however, most agreed that if viewing these images without knowing in which sport the athletes competed, it would be difficult to identify that they were Olympic skiers and snowboarders. Additionally, participants considered the passive codes of gender, outlined in week one's documentary film, and noted that while in one image the athlete was jumping and active, the other codes of passivity, such as hair twirling, and poses that were decentred (Jhally 9) were dominant.

Additionally, participants took into consideration Share, Jolls, and Thoman's question, "how might different people understand this message differently from me?" (9) and debated the impact these images may have on younger athletes, male and female, who looked to Bidez, Schnoor and Vonn as potential sport role models.

Having focused on male homosexual media representation in the previous week, *Playing Unfair: The Media Image of the Female Athlete* provided an opportunity to explore the representation of lesbian athletes in the media. The documentary film suggests that within the sport's community, there is anxiety about women who are openly gay and that for this reason, some female athletes' heterosexuality is emphasised in much of the media coverage about them (Kane 9). Building on this, participants considered the media depiction of South African runner, Caster Semenya and examined before and after images of this athlete's makeover (figure 11). They considered Share, Jolls and Thoman's key question, "what lifestyles values and points of view are represented" (9) in the media coverage and promotion of a makeover in which Semenya "swapped her tracksuit with stilettos" (Yaniv nydailynews.com) to emphasize her femininity.



Figure 11. From left to right; Semenya competing on the track; Semenya as she appears on South African magazine *You* after receiving a makeover; Yaniv, Oren. "Athlete Caster Semenya Forced to take Gender Test to Confirm Sex – Appears as Girly Mag Cover Model." NYDailyNews.com. Daily News. 9 September 2009. Web. 3 March 2010.

As part of their examination of Semenya's makeover, participants also considered an assertion by educator Pat Griffin that "there is a protective camouflage of feminine drag that women athletes ... feel compelled to monitor in themselves and in others. It's this need to reassure people – I'm an athlete ... but don't worry, I'm still a normal woman" (9). Building on this, and based on the themes they had examined over the four weeks, participants considered what characteristics the media perpetuated as "normal" for women, and whether Semenya fit this mould. Participants contemplated whether the controversy over Semenya's gender may be a product of homophobia, even though Semenya never publicly identified as lesbian, and debated if her makeover could have any impact on her athletic abilities.

Playing Unfair: The Media Image of the Female Athlete, though compiled eight years ago, proved an effective documentary for examining the sexualization of women, not only in sports coverage, but in variety of other media genres. It should be noted, however, that this documentary film is based in a U.S context and references to *Title IX*¹⁶ are a major component of its analysis. However, many of the tropes to which the documentary film refers, such as: hyper-sexuality: heteronormativity: and white beauty norms are dominant in a North American media in general, and, as a result, the issues the documentary film raises are relevant to North American classrooms.

At thirty minutes, it was the shortest of the four films. As this was the final meeting, and getting close to the end of the semester, I wanted to give participants a

¹⁶ Women's Sports Foundation Chief Executive Officer, Donna Lopiano states, "Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is a federal [American] law that prohibits sex discrimination in any educational program or activity at any educational institution that is a recipient of federal funds"(womenssportsfoundations.org).

documentary film that was concise, with fewer themes to consider. Additionally, I had participants fill out surveys in our final meeting and it was important that enough time was allotted for this aspect.

I also chose to screen this documentary in the last workshop as I wanted participants to consider the pervasiveness of postfeminism's paradoxical empowerment model in a genre that has the potential to offer alternatives to the passive feminine model we had examined in the four-weeks. With this in mind, participants considered the implications of promoting female athletes within hyper-sexualized, heterosexual models and whether framing their images in this way hampered societal perceptions of their athletic abilities, and/or the validity of women's sports in general.

I ended the workshop series with a question drawn from themes in *Playing Unfair* that I felt applied not only to that day's analysis, but to all the themes examined in the workshop. Based on models of femininity explored over the past four weeks I asked participants, do we have a "cultural anxiety about strong women" in our culture?"(Griffin 6). This seemed an appropriate question in light of the representations we interrogated throughout the workshop. From advertisements to tweens, to music and sports, postfeminist paradoxes of aggressive hyper-sexuality and essentialized passivity, in combination with white, heterosexual beauty norms had defined much of the media forms we had analyzed. However, in adhering to the approach I had outlined in creating this workshop, I did not seek one correct or incorrect response to this question. Rather, I wanted participants to consider this question in reference to the media we had examined up to this point, and that which they would encounter after the workshop ended. I felt this was a fitting way to end the workshop, because although no consensus was reached about

whether the images, documentaries, and products we analyzed were right or wrong in their appeal, or the critique they offered, the participants demonstrated that there was much to reflect, debate and question about them.

All Dressed Up and Somewhere to Go: Suggestions for the Future and Conclusions:

Overall, participants responded well to all four-parts of the workshop. All were engaged, shared their opinions readily, and were thoughtful in their responses to the documentary films, key questions and to each other. Without their commitment and enthusiasm, *Undressing Pop Culture: The Workshop* could not have been a success, and I am grateful to have had such a dedicated group of volunteers agree to participate in this project. To this end, it was imperative to gain their input on the efficacy or limitations of the workshop. With this in mind, I asked them to fill out anonymous questionnaires on the final day while I waited outside the Sally Davis Seminar Room, SN4087. I requested this in order to see if I, as facilitator and creator, met the goals I had outlined for the workshop. I also wanted to inquire about other media the participants were interested in exploring, that may not have been included in the workshop.

As previously mentioned, one of the primary goals for *Undressing Pop Culture: The Workshop* was to give participants the tools to critically analyze media, both within the workshop, and long after it ended. Based on their responses to the questionnaires, I feel this goal was met. All replied that they would continue to apply what they learned to media they encountered outside the university as well as in their other coursework. Equally important, I wanted to garner whether there was anything participants would have liked to explore further. Based on the question, "suggestions for other topics of exploration" participants recommended topics such as, women in school and politics; transgendered and transsexual lifestyles; as well as movies. There are many media resources on such topics and perhaps if future media workshops were to occur, these topics could be included. Some possible resources to explore these themes may include:

the Media Education Foundation's *Militainment Inc: Militarism & Pop Culture* (2007); *Further Off the Straight and Narrow: New Gay Visibility on Television 1998-2006* (2006); and *The Mean World Syndrome: Media Violence & the Cultivation of Fear* (2010) (mediaed.org). All these documentary films are available at the QEII Library on Memorial University's St. John's campus. Additionally, I did not include analysis on some of the new social media trends, such as *facebook* and *Twitter* for example. Although, considered relatively new media, there is burgeoning research on this subject¹⁷ that could also be included in future media literacy workshops.

Additionally, although the toolkit is intended as a classroom resource for teaching and talking about contemporary media, there are some limitations to its usefulness if future workshops were to occur. As the media is in a state of flux, with new technologies being adapted and incorporated all the time, providing a timeless resource for classroom use is a challenge. However, the toolkit is designed so others may add new resources to its contents, and my hope is that it can serve both as a teaching resource and building block for examining media culture in the classroom. With this in mind, many of the "tools" for media analysis that are provided, such as Share, Jolls and Thoman's key questions and concepts, are applicable to a variety of media genres, and time frames, and as a result, are applicable to new documentary films and/or media products as they become available.

One other possible mode of media analysis, that was not included in the workshop, centers on media production, which as media education consultant Robert

¹⁷ For example, see Connie Morrison's book: *Who Do They Think They Are?: Teenage Girls and their Avatars in Spaces of Social Online Communication*. New York: Peter Lang Pub Inc. 2010. It is part of the New Literacies and Digital Epistemologies series.

McCannon suggests, is a valuable media literacy production technique ... [which can take the form of] anti-ads ... public service announcements, spoof ads, or ad satires" (557). He further explains,

Counter ads can be effective educational and motivational devices. They can be parodies of advertisements and deliver untold information, yet they use the same persuasion techniques as real ads. By creating counter-ads, students can apply media literacy analysis skills to production, communicating positive messages in a fun and engaging exercise. (557)

I did not include this type of analysis primarily because of time constraints and my own lack of experience with media production. However, in June 2010, I had the opportunity to observe and participate in a workshop based on media production as a mode of critical media literacy called *Shout Out Media*.¹⁸ In this workshop, sponsored by *The Girls Action Foundation*, a group of girls scripted, acted and filmed their own videos as a way to challenge some of the dominant messages aimed at young women in current popular media. The facilitators, all with film and media production backgrounds, provided camera equipment and taught the girls how to use it. Although this workshop's approach differed from the approach I adhered to in *Undressing Pop Culture*, (it was not structured around Share, Jolls and Thoman's five key questions for example, and it did not screen any documentary films), it did provide insight into the decisions made in the creation and production of media by having the participants create their own messages. If future workshops were to occur, I think the mode of analysis provided in *Undressing Pop Culture* in combination with the media production techniques used in *Shout Out Media*

¹⁸ For more information on this organization and to view some of the videos and pictures produced during the tour go to <http://shoutoutmedia.ning.com/>.

could be a powerful combination. However, issues of time and resources would have to be addressed.

In the end, I learned as much from the participants as I hope they did from me. Although I provided them with the tools and techniques to question some of the media's messages, they came to this workshop armed with their own ideas and questions about media's impact on our society. As Women's Studies' students, they were well-versed in concepts of heteronormativity, social constructs of gender, and were becoming aware of complex negotiations between gender, race and sexuality. Although there was not always agreement, and participants did not always interpret postfeminism's models in the way that I had expected, creating a workshop that encouraged open-ended discussions and debate proved a rich learning experience. Participants had the best response to the discussion based analysis with media artefacts using Share, Jolls and Thoman's five key questions and core concepts. There was always extensive discussion and participants seemed eager to apply what they learned to current media products and images that I provided. Additionally, some participants commented that the workshop provided an opportunity for socialization in which they could share ideas about media and Women's Studies issues. My hope is that this was encouraged by the interactive and non-competitive atmosphere I tried to create. In fact, one participant commented that she would miss our weekly workshops and the entertainment it provided her with each Friday. I interpret this to be indicative that the pleasurable aspects of media were equally as emphasised as the critical analysis of some of its messages, and that I was successful in abstaining from imposing a moralistic point of view about the perceived harms of media. Although, I could neither predict nor control how participants would respond to or

interpret the images, products and modes of analysis which I showed them a collaborative, dynamic learning environment was created in which we learned from each other's unique and diverse experiences with media, gender and feminism. For this, I think *Undressing Pop Culture: The Workshop* was a success, as it built on conversations already occurring in Women's Studies' classrooms and aided in creating a toolkit that I hope will bring these important discussions to other students' everyday encounters with visual media.

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March 2010.

Appendix 1

Undressing Pop Culture



Fridays in February 12:00-2:00pm in the Sally Davis Seminar Room SN 4087

A Student Only Space

Facilitated by Women's Studies Graduate Student, Andrea Dawe

SPACE IS LIMITED

To register or for more information send an email to andrea.dawe@mun.ca

Snacks will be provided and a random draw for a small prize will occur on the final day

Participation is voluntary, and has no bearing on academic standing. This workshop is not a required part of Women's Studies course work. Students are not obligated to attend. Contacting the above email for more information also does not obligate students to attend.

Undressing Pop Culture Toolkit:
A Teaching Resource for Analyzing Media Constructs in the Classroom

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Gender in Advertisements: Classroom Resources

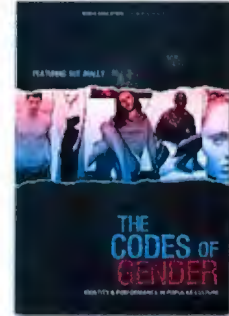
Documentary Film:

Title: *The Codes of Gender: Identity and Performance in Pop Culture* (2009)

Publisher: The Media Education Foundation

Length: 46 minutes (Abridged Version); 73 minutes (Full Length Version)

To Access: *Call Number: P 96 S5 C6 2009;
Queen Elizabeth II Library, Memorial University of Newfoundland



The following is an advertised synopsis of *The Codes of Gender: Identity and Performance in Pop Culture* (2009) as per the Media Education Foundation's website (mediaed.org):

Written and directed by MEF Executive Director Sut Jhally, *The Codes of Gender* applies the late sociologist Erving Goffman's groundbreaking analysis of advertising to the contemporary commercial landscape, showing how one of American popular culture's most influential forms communicates normative ideas about masculinity and femininity.

In striking visual detail, *The Codes of Gender* explores Goffman's central claim that gender ideals are the result of ritualized cultural performance, uncovering a remarkable pattern of masculine and feminine displays and poses. It looks beyond advertising as a medium that simply sells products, and beyond analyses of gender that focus on biological difference or issues of objectification and beauty, to provide a clear-eyed view of the two-tiered terrain of identity and power relations.

With its sustained focus on how our perceptions of what it means to be a man or a woman get reproduced and reinforced on the level of culture in our everyday lives, *The Codes of Gender* is certain to inspire discussion and debate across a range of disciplines.

Viewer Discretion Advisory: This program contains violence, nudity, and sexual themes.

Sections: Sex and Gender | The Feminine Touch | The Ritualization of Subordination | Licensed Withdrawal | Infantilization | The Codes of Masculinity | Trapped in the Code | History, Power, and Gender Display (mediaed.org).

Suggested Media Materials for Classroom Use:

- 1980s Advertisements available in the Women's Studies Image Archive, filed under *The Beauty Myth*
- 1953 Chatelaine Magazine available electronically in the Women's Studies Image Archive, filed under *Flash Drive* (see folder)
- Current magazine publications such as *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan* magazine
- *Five Core Concepts & Five Key Questions* Handout (see page 4)
- *Deconstructing an Advertisement (for a print advertisement)* Handout: (see page 5-6); Also available at:
<http://www.mediaed.org/Handouts/DeconstructinganAd.pdf>

Additional Resources:

- *The Codes of Gender: Identity and Performance in Pop Culture* Transcript:
http://www.mediaed.org/assets/products/238/transcript_238.pdf
- The website, *genderads.com* provides examples of advertising images. Founded by Dr. Scott A. Lukas as part of *The Gender Ads Project* (California), the website provides a vast number of images ranging from objectification, to the gaze, to homosexuality. *Please note – this is not a scholarly website.
- In 2010 The Media Education Foundation released *Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising's Image of Women*, the much anticipated follow up to *Killing Us Softly 3* (2000) in which media critic Jean Kilbourne analyzes depictions of femininity in advertisements.
It is available at the QEII Library on Memorial University's campus.
*Call number: HF 5827.85 K5

Scholarly Sources /Reviews

- Berger, John. "Excerpt From Ways of Seeing." *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World*. Ed(s) Grewal, Inderpal and Caren Kaplan. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006. 269-273. Print.
- Gill, Rosalind. "Empowerment/Sexism: Figuring Female Sexual Agency in Contemporary Advertising." *Feminism & Psychology* 18. 1 (2008): 35-60. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.

- Lazar, Michelle. "Discover the Power of Femininity! Analyzing Global "Power Femininity" in Local Advertising." *Feminist Media Studies* 6. 4 (2006): 505-517. Web. 1 April 2010.
- For a review of this film see page 7-8, reprinted from Educational Media Reviews Online.

Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions Handout:

(c) 2002 Center for Media Literacy www.medialit.org Used with permission.

<div>MediaLitKIT™</div> CML's Five Core Concepts & Five Key Questions			
	Keywords	Core Concepts	Key Questions
#1	Authorship	All media messages are "constructed."	Who created this message?
#2	Format	Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.	What techniques are used to attract my attention?
#3	Audience	Different people experience the same media message differently.	How might different people understand this message differently?
#4	Content	Media have embedded values and points of view.	What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
#5	Purpose	Most media are organized to gain profit and/or power.	Why was this message sent?

© 2005 Center for Media Literacy / www.medialit.org Five Key Questions That Can Change the World

Source:

Share, Jeff and Tessa Jolls and Elizabeth Thoman. "Five Key Questions that Can Change the World: Classroom Lesson Plans for Media Literacy: Part II- Practice CML Media Lit Kit, A Framework for Learning and Teaching in a Media Age." *CML Center for Media Literacy: Empowerment Through Education*. Center for Media Literacy, (2005). http://www.medialit.org/pdf/mlk/02_5KQ_ClassroomGuide.pdf. 16 July 2010.

Deconstructing an Advertisement (for a print advertisement) Handout:

*Source: *Deconstructing an Advertisement*. Media Education Foundation, nd.
<http://www.mediaed.org/Handouts/DeconstructinganAd.pdf>. 25 July 2010.

STEP 1: MAKE OBSERVATIONS

- Think of five adjectives that describe the ad.
- Look at the ad and evaluate its aesthetics: Are there people depicted in the ad? What gender is represented? What race? What do the people look like (young, old, stylish, etc.)? What are their facial expressions?
- Estimate what the camera angle was. Was it far from the subject or close to it? Was it above, eye-level, or below the subject?
- Take note of the lighting used in the ad. Does it appear to be natural or artificial? Why or why not? Are certain parts of the ad highlighted while others are not? If so, why do you think this is? Are there shadows? If so, how big are they?
- What colors are used? Are they bright? Black and white? In sharp contrast to each other? If the ad has text or copy, how does it look? What kind of font is used? Is more than one type of font used? How big is the text? What color is the text? Is there more than one color used? What does the text actually say? What does the large text say? The small text?

STEP 2: DETERMINE THE PURPOSE OF THE AD

- *Remember that the purpose of an ad is always to sell a product!*
- What product is being sold?
- Do you find the product appealing? Why or why not?
- Who is the target audience for this product? Children? Teens? Adults? The elderly?
- What feelings or emotions is the ad trying to associate with the product? Did it work?
- Why or why not?

STEP 3: DETERMINE THE ASSUMPTIONS THE AD MAKES & THE MESSAGES IT SENDS

- Assumptions may not be contained directly in the ads themselves, but in the messages that are produced from them
- What assumptions does the ad make about gender? (*i.e. Women are powerful when they hold a hair dryer in their hands. Men like to drink beer. Women are primary caregivers, etc...*)
- Are these assumptions realistic? Why or why not? Do these assumptions reinforce or challenge stereotypes about gender identity?
- What assumptions does the ad make about race (*i.e. African Americans are excellent athletes. Latinos are sensual and passionate...etc.*)? Are these assumptions realistic? Why or why not? Do these assumptions reinforce or challenge stereotypes about racial identity?
- What assumptions does the ad make about class (*i.e. Wealthy people are happy and trouble-free. Poor people are always looking for a handout, etc...*)? Are these assumptions realistic? Why or why not? Do these assumptions reinforce or challenge stereotypes about class?

STEP 4: CONSIDER THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF THESE MESSAGES

- What are some possible consequences? (long-term and short-term)
- Do the messages create unrealistic expectations for people? Why or why not?
- How do the messages in this ad counter or undermine social change?
- Is this ad socially responsible? How or how not? What does it mean for an ad or a company to be socially responsible?
- In the closing comments of the video *Killing Us Softly 3*, Jean Kilbourne states that change will depend upon “an aware, active, educated public that thinks for 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? Reflect on this ad with the above statement in mind.

Review of *The Codes of Gender: Identity and Performance in Popular Culture* (Reprint):

Source: Handman, Gary. *Educational Media Reviews Online*. University of Buffalo Libraries, 8 March 2010. Web. 25 July 2010.

Codes of Gender is a recent addition to the rapidly expanding catalog of the redoubtable Media Education Foundation. As is the case with many of MEF's productions, the video was written and directed by the Foundation's founder and moving force, renowned media theorist and cultural studies scholar Professor Sut Jhally (University of Massachusetts). Jhally also provides voice-over and on-screen narration for the video, which, like a fair number of MEF's titles, is basically a well produced lecture, accompanied by a superb array [of] illustrations drawn from various media. In *Codes of Gender* Jhally provides an extended riff on the influential writings and theories of sociologist Erving Goffman, focusing particularly on *Gendered Advertisements*, Goffman's ground-breaking deconstruction of gender codes and images in advertising. Jhally sets out to explain that unlike the generally cut-and-dried biological determinates and aspects of sex, there is "nothing natural about gender identity" or gender roles; the latter are entirely constructed, assigned, and taught by the culture into which we're born. As males and females, the way we walk, our body postures, our emotional aspects--our sense of what is normal or appropriate for a particular gender--are all more or less governed by codes, rules, and conventions that are more or less hardwired into the culture. Because these codes are so thoroughly normalized and subliminal, because they're under our cultural skin, they are largely invisible to us. Goffman/Jhally contend that one effective way to make these codes visible and to examine their function in the culture is to closely study advertising and other pop culture artifacts, which tend to distill, exaggerate, and reinforce existing gender conventions and notions. The majority of Jhally's discussion focuses on an often astounding series of advertisements which illustrate Goffman's taxonomies of gender display, the ways in which ads employ the body as text. These coded displays are often profoundly more subtle than the out-and-out baring of skin or obviously suggestive sexual poses. Jhally reveals a catalog of body tropes in ads, from the familiar model's stance with bent-knee or contorted torso, to an array of other physical cues, all intended to communicate passivity, availability, and subordination, what Goffman has termed the "ritualization of subordination."

Some of the most interesting points made concern the relationships and differences between codes of femininity and masculinity in ads (and society at large). Jhally suggests that a good way to reveal these differences and subvert our cultural expectations is to try a simple experiment: imagine switching exactly the figure of a male model for a female one in most ads. The results are incredibly revealing.

In other segments, the video takes on the rise of new gender images in the media, including the recent spate of movie super-heroines and kick-ass riot girrrrls, and women superstar athletes. Here, again, however, Jhally demonstrates that gender codes and expectations are so firmly ingrained in the culture and its media, that more often than not,

lurking just under the surface of these images of female empowerment and agency are the same old coded rituals of subordination.

While *Codes of Gender* is a definitely engaging and highly informative piece of work and well worth acquiring for most libraries, it is not without its problems. Jhally's explanation of *why* advertisers strategically choose to exploit these codes, the connection between gender exploitation and capitalism, seems a bit perfunctory. One assumes that the use of codes of ritualized submission and sexual availability in women's clothing ads sells frocks because it's assumed by advertisers that women desiring to be desired will respond to conventionized codes and images. This isn't ever really discussed (except in the segments on gay imagery).

I found that the 74 minute version that I viewed (there's also a 46 minute abridged version, which I did not screen) often tends to be maddeningly repetitive in some spots ("OK, Sut, I get it: there's nothing natural about gender roles and codes!"). There are also some segments in the long version that could have probably been trimmed. Using the writing of art historian John Berger (*Ways of Seeing*) as a jumping off point, Jhally races through the psycho-cultural and psycho-historical precedents for the pandering of ads to the male gaze. It's a discussion that could profitably be grist for a whole separate MEF documentary. Similarly, Jhally spends a somewhat inordinate amount of time training his sights and his (well-contained) ire on the fetishized ads of clothing manufacturer GUESS and on the over-the-top gender fantasies of its founder, Paul Marciano. As sleazy as GUESS ads and Marciano are, they don't seem any more egregious than Calvin Klein and his emaciated, androgynous "heroin chic" models—or most other clothing houses, for that matter.

Despite these few qualms, I found *Codes of Gender* to be completely engrossing--no little feat given the fairly static talking-head and slide-show format of the video. For a generally jaded viewer such as I, perhaps the best measure of the effectiveness of this work is the fact that it made me see things I hadn't seen before and made me think in new ways about the ubiquitous images and messages that inundate and inform everyday life (Handman, *Educational Media Reviews Online*).

Masculinity and Femininity in Music Video: Classroom Resources

Documentary Film:

Title: *Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex and Power in Music Video* (2007)

Publisher: The Media Education Foundation

Length: 54 minutes

To Access: *Call Number: CMC AV 302.23 DRE 2007;
Curriculum Materials Center, Memorial University of
Newfoundland



The following is an advertised synopsis of *Dreamworlds 3, Desire Sex and Power in Music Video* as per The Media Education Foundation's website (mediaed.org):

“Dreamworlds 3”, the highly anticipated update of Sut Jhally's groundbreaking “Dreamworlds 2” (1995), examines the stories contemporary music videos tell about girls and women, and encourages viewers to consider how these narratives shape individual and cultural attitudes about sexuality.

Illustrated with hundreds of up-to-date images, “Dreamworlds 3” offers a unique and powerful tool for understanding both the continuing influence of music videos and how pop culture more generally filters the identities of young men and women through a dangerously narrow set of myths about sexuality and gender. In doing so, it inspires viewers to reflect critically on images that they might otherwise take for granted.

Sections: Introduction | Techniques of Storytelling | Constructing Femininity | The Pornographic Imagination | Ways of Looking | Female Artists: Trapped in the Pornographic Gaze | Masculinity & Control (mediaed.org).

Suggested Media Materials for Classroom Use:

- *Five Core Concepts & Five Key Questions* Handout (see page 4)
- *Deconstructing a Video Advertisement* Handout (see page 11-13); Also available at: <http://www.mediaed.org/Handouts/DeconstructVideoAd.pdf>
- Music Videos: To access/view contemporary music videos see: <http://www.muchmusic.com/music/freshvideos/>; This link provides free access to the latest music videos from a variety of music genres

Additional Resources:

- “*Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex and Power in Music Video* Transcript: http://www.mediaed.org/assets/products/223/transcript_223.pdf
- “*Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex and Power in Music Video* Study Guide: http://www.mediaed.org/assets/products/223/studyguide_223.pdf

Scholarly Sources /Reviews

- Emerson, Rana. "Where My Girls At? Negotiating Black Womanhood in Music Videos." *Gender and Society* 16.1 (2002): 115-135. Web. 25 July 2010.
- Lewis Lisa. "MTV's Industrial Imperatives." *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference*. Lewis, Lisa. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990. 13-26. Print.
- Railton, Diane and Paul Watson. "Naughty Girls and Red Blooded Women Representations of Female Heterosexuality in Music Video." *Feminist Media Studies* 5.1 (2005): 51-63. Web. 25 July 2010.
- For a review of this film see pages 14-16, reprinted from Educational Media Reviews Online.

Deconstructing a Video Advertisement Handout:

Source: *Deconstructing an Advertisement*. Media Education Foundation, nd.
<http://www.mediaed.org/Handouts/DeconstructinganAd.pdf>. 25 July 2010.

STEP 1: MAKE OBSERVATIONS

- Watch the ad from start to finish (*with audio and at normal speed*). Think of five adjectives that describe the ad.
- Watch the ad a second time and evaluate its aesthetics (*Note: the frame is the space the ad takes up, or everything you can see in the “world” of the ad.*): Are there people depicted in the ad? What gender is represented? Are both genders represented equally? What do the people look like (*young, old, stylish, etc.*)? What are their facial expressions? How are they dressed? Where is the person, or subject, in relation to the product being sold? (*Think of this in terms of ‘frame geography’. For example, is the person at the center of the frame, while the product itself is in the lower right hand corner of the ad?*)
- Estimate how the camera was used. The angles: Does it appear to be far from the subject, or close to it, or somewhere in between? Does the camera appear to be above the subject, below it, or at eye-level? Does the camera seem to move a lot: from right to left, or from top to bottom, of the frame?
- Take note of the lighting used in the ad. Does it appear to be natural or artificial (*daylight or flashing lights of different colors*)? Why or why not? Are certain parts of the ad highlighted while others are not? If so, why do you think this is? Are there shadows? If so, how big are they?
- What colors are used? Are they bright or in sharp contrast to one another? Is the whole ad in black and white, etc.? Do the colors change?
- Does the ad have text or copy? If so, how does it look? What kind of font is used? Is there more than one type of font used? How big is the text? What color is the text?
Is there more than one color used? What does the text actually say: the large text and the small text? Where is the text located in the frame? Does the text move?
- Does the ad contain any other graphics like animation? If so, describe them.
- Play the ad again from start to finish, but this time, listen to the audio only. Describe the sound of the ad: Is it a person talking? What gender is the person? Does the ad have music? What genre of music is used? Do you recognize the song? Does the product have its own jingle (*i.e. the Oscar Mayer bologna song*)?

- What does the ad actually say? Listen and write it down. Is what the ad says different from the written words or scenario depicted in the ad? If so, why do you think this is?
- What is the product's brand name (*i.e. Campbell's makes Soup on the Go*)? How many times do you hear the brand name of the product?
- What is the product's slogan? Where is that located in the ad? How many times did you hear it?

STEP 2: DETERMINE THE PURPOSE OF THE AD

- *Remember that the purpose of an ad is always to sell a product!*
- What product is being sold?
- Do you find the product appealing? Why or why not?
- Who is the target audience for this product? Children? Teens? Adults? The elderly?
- What feelings or emotions is the ad trying to associate with the product? Did it work? Why or why not?
- Would you, or do you, actually use the product being advertised? Why or why not?

STEP 3: DETERMINE THE ASSUMPTIONS THE AD MAKES & THE MESSAGES IT SENDS

- Assumptions may not be contained directly in the ads themselves, but in the messages that are produced from them
- What assumptions does the ad make about gender? (*i.e. Women are powerful when they hold a hair dryer in their hands. Men like to drink beer. Women are primary caregivers, etc...*) Are these assumptions realistic? Why or why not? Do these assumptions reinforce or challenge stereotypes about gender identity?
- What assumptions does the ad make about race (*i.e. African Americans are excellent athletes. Latinos are sensual and passionate. Etc.*)? Are these assumptions realistic? Why or why not? Do these assumptions reinforce or challenge stereotypes about racial identity?

- What assumptions does the ad make about class (*i.e. Wealthy people are happy and trouble-free. Poor people are always looking for a handout, etc..*)? Are these assumptions realistic? Why or why not? Do these assumptions reinforce or challenge stereotypes about class?

STEP 4: CONSIDER THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF THESE MESSAGES

- What are some possible consequences of the message(s) you've identified? (*long-term and short-term*)
- Do the messages create unrealistic expectations for people? Why or why not?
- How do the messages in this ad counter or undermine social change?
- Is this ad socially responsible? How or how not? What does it mean for an ad or a company to be socially responsible?
- In the closing comments of the video *Killing Us Softly 3*, Jean Kilbourne states that change will depend upon "an aware, active, educated public that thinks for 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? Reflect on this ad with the above statement in mind.

Review of *Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex & Power in Music Video* (Reprint):

Source: DiLandro, Dan. *Educational Media Reviews Online*. University of Buffalo Libraries, Dec. 2007. Web. 25 July 2010.

There exists widespread cultural sensitivity to fairness and tolerance, any many significantly-noted eruptions of bigotry or misogyny seem to be met with the disclaimer that the issue might somehow open a “cultural debate.” Arguably, though, the debate never really occurs, and few serious outlets have investigated the cultural and pop-cultural causes and relationships of these issues and overall social consciousness. Of these few serious studies that offer useful, logical information while providing a forum for debate is Sut Jhally’s *Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex & Power in Music Video*. A follow-up to *Dreamworlds* and *Dreamworlds 2* (1991 and 1995, respectively), *Dreamworlds 3* continues the investigation of the social constructs of music videos and how they draw from, reinforce, and shape cultural ideas and ideals about masculinity, femininity, and individualism.

Jhally opens his film with the observation that the hyper-masculine world view (the “Dreamworld,” the director names it) has been endemic in advertising for years. The creation of “fantasy female characters” runs the commercial engine of everyday products, but is heightened and extremized in the music video. Significantly, Jhally points out that even seemingly now “tame” videos from almost the onset of the music video in the early 1980s employed hypersexual images, promoting women’s bodies as a type of currency. This transference of human beings into a currency and as things to be used, bought, and sold is made obvious with the images the director uses to accompany his narration. Truly, images taken out of the context of their videos and presented with a thoughtful and intelligent critique makes them especially shocking, objectivizing, and banal.

Jhally makes somewhat sweeping statements, but *always* proves their truth with excellent selections from the videos themselves. That is, much in the critical field might speak of the objectification of women, but the author shows—in sometimes both ridiculously-out-of-context and rather filthy video clips—how exactly this is true. In the same manner, the statement that videos are predicated upon and promote the “adolescent male fantasy” would seem dogmatic in less skilled hands, yet the author makes a compelling case as to why, exactly, this is so. Narration over selected images in *Dreamworlds 3* never seems forced, and always at least provides extremely evocative food for thought. This film will both raise questions and prove compelling to audiences.

To prove his points, Jhally deconstructs images, themes, and tropes in popular music videos. The director may make some seemingly blanket-type statements, but he always provides ample evidence to support his theories. For example, saying that videos are conventionally constructed so that numerous fetishized women crave a sole man might seem as if it is a terribly over-reaching statement, but the director matches his theory to so many images that support this claim that the idea becomes clear and believable. Many of

the claims of misogyny, objectification, and “lowest common denominator” that are often promoted culturally in this troubling debate are proven in Jhally’s work. Indeed and importantly, the director shows that the glamorization and normalization of degradation is not limited to what we might limit to “gansta rap,” but is endemic across the music video genre.

The director further opens the appeal of this film by investigating the filmic techniques of contemporary music videos. It is somewhat surprising for a film of this nature to deconstruct even the manner in which videos are typically filmed, explaining that certain oft-used shots and camera angles add to and reinforce the concept of woman as object. All of this critique is done intelligently -- which is to say that, while “academic,” the director/narrator is never dogmatic or even moralistic, that he speaks at an accessible level, and that he, again, backs up his research with evocative images.

If Jhally cannot necessarily prove his ideas on the interplay between the overall desires of our culture, the commercialization of videos, and the drawing from and forming ideas in society, he can certainly provide enough narrative and visual information to open an extremely important dialog regarding the give/take nature of music videos. Are they solely shaping culture? Are they merely giving back to us what we want to see? Or is it something in between? *Dreamworlds 3* provides some answers, but will certainly provide a basis for a dialog on these issues that we might be arguably culturally and conventionally lacking.

This is not to say that the film is entirely without faults. The counter-argument to debates regarding race, misogyny, and generally conceived notions for and against the idea of contemporary music videos is often that sweeping statements are made without proof. While this is, again, rare in Jhally’s work, once or twice statements are made that cannot be entirely proven within the film. For example, Jhally notes that “largely” white men control the corporate media and direction of the music video machine. This statement evokes a common though somewhat confusing argument regarding the media. What to make of African-American owned and run production studios, for example? Too, it is not immediately clear why this fact necessarily leads to objectification of women. Similarly, the director notes many female artists like Mariah Carey, Christina Aguilera, Jessica Simpson, Jewel, and Janet Jackson embarked on a “journey to objectification” and followed the “sexual imperative” after having had more demure careers and self-promotion. It is unclear why they “had” to recreate their images into much more conventional (that is, female-as-objects) fetishized images. Is it simply for commercial purposes or is there a deeper meaning here?

(Notably, even in the very, very few “troubling” sections of the film, Jhally manages to offer fascinating questions. For example, in Jackson’s now-infamous 2004 Superbowl appearance -- which provided our culture with the concept of a “wardrobe malfunction” -- where, notes the director, was the censure against Justin Timberlake, who actually tore Jackson’s clothing off? This criticism, he proves, is not proffered because Timberlake was filling a now-accepted role as man-as-aggressor/woman-as-object....)

Dreamworlds 3, as can be imagined, contains perhaps offensive language, violence, and sexual imagery. Thus, it is inappropriate for younger or sensitive audiences.

In short, though, any real criticism of the film is something like nit-picking. *Dreamworlds 3* is an important and useful work. For its study of the interplay between the larger culture and music videos, it is highly recommended for collections that focus on pop-culture; for its investigation on the objectification of people, it is essential for women's or gender studies; for the deconstruction of narrative and film techniques, it is important in film and media studies; and for anyone at all invested in the debate regarding the media's influence on culture, it is **highly recommended** overall. (DiLandro, *Educational Media Reviews Online*).

Masculinity and Femininity in Sports Media: Classroom Resources

Documentary Film:

Title: The Media Education Foundation's *Playing Unfair: The Media Image of the Female Athlete*; 2002

Publisher: Media Education Foundation

Length: 30 minutes; contains 35 minutes of additional footage and slide show



To Access: *Call Number: GV 709 P58 2003; Queen Elizabeth II Library, Memorial University of Newfoundland

The following is an advertised synopsis of *Playing Unfair: The Media Image of the Female Athlete* as per the Media Education Foundation's website (mediaed.org):

It has been 30 years since Title IX [US] legislation granted women equal playing time, but the male-dominated world of sports journalism has yet to catch up with the law. Coverage of women's sport lags far behind men's, and focuses on female athletes' femininity and sexuality over their achievements on the court and field. While female athleticism challenges gender norms, women athletes continue to be depicted in traditional roles that reaffirm their femininity - as wives and mothers or sex objects. By comparison, male athletes are framed according to heroic masculine ideals that honor courage, strength, and endurance.

"Playing Unfair" is the first video to critically examine the post-Title IX media landscape in terms of the representation of female athletes.

Sports media scholars Mary Jo Kane (University of Minnesota), Pat Griffin (University of Massachusetts), and Michael Messner (University of Southern California) look at the persistence of heterosexism and homophobia in perpetuating gender stereotypes. They argue for new media images which fairly and accurately depict the strength and competence of female athletes. Using numerous media examples, *Playing Unfair* is sure to stimulate debate among women and men, athletes and non-athletes about the meaning of these images in world transformed by the presence of women in sport.

Sections: Taking the Field: The Impact of Title IX | Out of Uniform: The Media Backlash Against Female Athletes | Playing Along: Empowerment or Exploitation? | The Glass Closet: Homophobia In Sport & Sports Media | Fair Play: Women Athletes in Action (mediaed.org).

Suggested Media Materials for Classroom Use:

- *Five Core Concepts & Five Key Questions* Handout (see page 4)
- Sports media websites; <http://espn.go.com/>; <http://www.tsn.ca/>; <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/>
- Images of female Olympic athletes featured on the *Sports Illustrated* website: http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2010_swimsuit/winter/
- Images of a variety of female athletes posing in bikinis: <http://www.popcrunch.com/the-50-hottest-women-of-sports-1-10/>
- Before and after images of Caster Semenya's makeover: <http://leeloveshottrends.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/Caster-Semenya-Makeover-Before-and-After1.jpg>

Additional Resources:

- *Playing Unfair: The Media Image of the Female Athlete* Transcript: http://www.mediaed.org/assets/products/208/transcript_208.pdf
- *Playing Unfair: The Media Image of the Female Athlete* Study Guide: http://www.mediaed.org/assets/products/208/studyguide_208.pdf

Scholarly Sources /Reviews

- Caudwell, Jayne. "Girlfight and Bend it Like Beckham: Screening Women, Sport, and Sexuality." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 13. 3 (2009): 255-271. Web. 25 July 2010.
- Evans, Bethan. "'I'd Feel Ashamed': Girls' Bodies and Sports Participation." *Gender, Place, and Culture* 13. 5 (2006): 547-561. Web. 22 November 2009.
- Nyong'o Tavia. "The Unforgivable Transgression of being Caster Semenya." *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 20. 1 (2010): 95-100. Web. 25 July 2010.
- As yet, no suitable reviews of this film.

Sexualization of Tween/Teen Media: Classroom Resources

Documentary Film:

Title: *Sexy Inc. Our Children under the Influence*

Publisher: The National Film Board of Canada

Length: 35 minutes

To Access: The NFB website; http://www.nfb.ca/film/sexy_inc/; The A.C. Hunter Adult Library; Arts and Culture Center, 125 Allandale Road, St. John's, Newfoundland



Note: Parts of this documentary film are subtitled in English

The following is an advertised synopsis of *Sexy Inc. Our Children under the Influence* as per The National Film Board of Canada's website:

Sophie Bissonnette's documentary analyzes the hypersexualization of our environment and its noxious effects on young people. Psychologists, teachers and school nurses criticize the unhealthy culture surrounding our children, where marketing and advertising are targeting younger and younger audiences and bombarding them with sexual and sexist images. "Sexy Inc." suggests various ways of countering hypersexualization and the eroticization of childhood and invites us to rally against this worrying phenomenon (nfb.ca).

Suggested Media Materials for Classroom Use:

- *Five Core Concepts & Five Key Questions* Handout (see page 4)
- Images of MGM Entertainment's *Bratz* dolls; <http://www.bratz.com/>
- Lists of media ownership: For detailed lists of the five major media conglomerates – Time Warner, Disney, Murdoch's News Corporation, Bertelsmann of Germany, and Viacom" (Badgikian, quoted in Stack and Kelly 8) and what they own see *The Columbia Journalism Review's* webpage: <http://www.cjr.org/resources/>

Additional Resources:

- *Sexy Inc. Our Children Under the Influence: Facilitation Guide:* http://films.nfb.ca/sexy-inc/medias/pdf/ONFSEXYINC_GUIDE_AN.pdf
- For more information on the documentary film's director Sophie Bissonnette see <http://films.nfb.ca/sexy-inc/film.php>
- Media Education Foundation's documentary film; *Mickey Mouse Monopoly: Disney, Childhood and Corporate Power* (2002); available at The Curriculum Materials Center, Memorial University of Newfoundland; Call Number: CMC AV 302.23 MIC 2002
- *The Merchants of Cool*, PBS' Frontline "Report on the Creators and Marketers of Popular Culture for Teenagers" (2001); Available online at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/view/#rest>
- *Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls:* <http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report-full.pdf>

Scholarly Sources /Reviews

- Lamb, Sharon and Lyn Mikel Brown. "Pretty in Pink: What Girls Wear." *Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing Our Daughters From Marketers' Schemes*. Ed(s). Lamb, Sharon and Lyn Mikel Brown. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006. 13-56. Print.
- Lamb, Sharon and Lyn Mikel Brown. "See No Evil? What Girls Watch." *Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing Our Daughters From Marketers' Schemes*. Ed(s). Lamb, Sharon and Lyn Mikel Brown. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006. 57-116. Print.

*(Author Sharon Lamb provides commentary in the film and references her book as well).

- McAllister, Matthew P. "Girls with a passion for Fashion: The Bratz Brand as Integrated Spectacular Consumption." *Journal of Children and Media* 1. 3 (2007): 244-258. Web. 24 March 2010.
- Stack, Michelle and Deidre M. Kelly. "Popular Media, Education, and Resistance." *Canadian Journal of Education* 29.1 (2006): 5-26. Web. 20 June 2010.
- For a review of this film see page 22, reprinted from Educational Media Reviews Online.

Review of *Sexy Inc. Our Children under the Influence* (Reprint):

Source: Reed, Margaret M. *Educational Media Reviews Online*. University of Buffalo Libraries, 12 Nov. 2008. Web. 25 July 2010.

Sexy Inc. uncovers the surreptitious power the media and advertisers wield over society's most vulnerable consumers – children.

Produced as part of the project “Countering Youth Hypersexualization: Tools for Prevention and Action,” the film presents shocking evidence from the entertainment and fashion industries. Excerpts from sexually explicit music videos and seductive children's clothing illustrate how mature themes once considered marginal are now commonplace in the culture. Also quite telling is a youth workshop where participants are shown pairs of images and asked to distinguish teen publications from pornography.

Throughout the documentary, experts attest to the danger of overinvesting in image at the expense of cultivating identity. Psychologists, social workers, educators, and health care professionals make their case with an array of scientific and anecdotal evidence. They also offer realistic solutions for countering the ill effects of youth hypersexualization.

Sexy Inc. is a must-see for teachers, parents, and others who work with adolescents. It is also an excellent resource for psychology and sociology courses. Viewers will find the film's written guide helpful in facilitating discussion.

In 2008, *Sexy Inc.* received the UNICEF Prize at the Japan Prize Contest [an international contest for education media].

Highly recommended for academic and public libraries. (Reed, Educational Media Reviews Online).

Abstracts of Suggested Scholarly Sources

Gender in Advertisements:

- Berger, John. "Excerpt From Ways of Seeing." *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World*. Ed(s) Grewal, Inderpal and Caren Kaplan. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006. 269-273. Print.

Abstract: John Berger, art critic and cultural historian, made an important contribution to the way in which people think about art and images when he created a television series for the British Broadcasting Company in the early 1970's. He presented what was then a radically different way to view the history of Western art from a viewpoint that addressed issues of patriarchy and class difference. In this excerpt from the book based on the series, Berger tells us why it is important for us to take image, whether popular or elite, very seriously and how the way they convey meaning (their method of representation) differs from the written word. Berger wrote this feminist critique during a time period when use of the generic masculine was required for publication. You might think about how this language does or doesn't support the argument he makes in this piece.

- Gill, Rosalind. "Empowerment/Sexism: Figuring Female Sexual Agency in Contemporary Advertising." *Feminism & Psychology* 18. 1 (2008): 35-60. Web. 21 Nov. 2009.

Abstract: This article argues that there has been a significant shift in advertising representations of women in recent years, such that rather than being presented as passive objects of the male gaze, young women in adverts are now frequently depicted as active, independent and sexually powerful. This analysis examines contemporary constructions of female sexual agency in advertisements examining three recognizable 'figures': the young, heterosexually desiring 'midriff', the vengeful woman set on punishing her partner or ex-partner for his transgressions, and the 'hot lesbian', almost always entwined with her beautiful Other or double. Using recent examples of adverts, the article asks how this apparent 'agency' and 'empowerment' should be understood. Drawing on accounts of the incorporation or recuperation of feminist ideas in advertising, the article takes a critical approach to these representations, examining their exclusions, their constructions of gender relations and heteronormativity, and the way power is figured within them. A feminist poststructuralist approach is used to interrogate the way in which 'sexual agency' becomes a form of regulation in these adverts that requires the re-moulding of feminine subjectivity to fit the current postfeminist, neoliberal moment in which young women should not only be beautiful but sexy, sexually

knowledgeable/practised and always 'up for it'. The article makes an original contribution to debates about representations of gender in advertising, to poststructuralist analyses about the contemporary operation of power, and to writing about female 'sexual agency' by suggesting that 'voice' or 'agency' may not be the solution to the 'missing discourse of female desire' but may in fact be a technology of discipline and regulation.

- Lazar, Michelle. "Discover the Power of Femininity! Analyzing Global "Power Femininity" in Local Advertising." *Feminist Media Studies* 6. 4 (2006): 505-517. Web. 1 April 2010.

Abstract: The article examines the power of feminine identity in contemporary advertisements addressed to young modern women in Singapore. Power femininity is a popular assumption that feminist struggles have ended, and that full equality for all women has been achieved. An analysis of power femininity in advertising is presented. Popular postfeminism is media-friendly, consumer-oriented discourse. The relationship between feminism and advertising shows two points: social advertising of this kind is rarely genuinely progressive, and popular postfeminism is a commercially strategic appropriation of certain postfeminist currents.

Masculinity and Femininity in Music Videos:

- Emerson, Rana. "Where My Girls At? Negotiating Black Womanhood in Music Videos." *Gender and Society* 16.1 (2002): 115-135. Web. 25 July 2010.

Abstract: The literature on Black youth culture, especially hip-hop culture, has focused primarily on the experiences of young men, with the experiences of Black girls being all but ignored. However, the recent appearance of Black women performers, songwriters, and producers in Black popular culture has called attention to the ways in which young Black women use popular culture to negotiate social existence and attempt to express independence, self-reliance, and agency. This article is an exploration of the representations of Black womanhood as expressed in the music videos of Black women performers. The author first identifies themes that reflect controlling images of Black womanhood, then those that exemplify an expression of agency, and finally those appearing ambivalent and contradictory. Overall, the music videos express how young Black women must negotiate sexuality and womanhood in their everyday lives.

- Lewis Lisa. "MTV's Industrial Imperatives." *Gender Politics and MTV: Voicing the Difference*. Lewis, Lisa. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990. 13-26. Print.

Summary: By examining the videos and careers of female musicians Pat Benatar, Cyndi Lauper, Tina Turner, and Madonna, and their appeal to female audiences, Lisa A. Lewis challenges the idea that MTV presents only negative and sexist images of women. She shows that these artists have appropriated music video as a vehicle of feminist expression and have reinterpreted the signs of a gender-typed culture clothing, dance, the use of the street as public space, and even musical instruments. By appropriating these symbols of female empowerment, female rock and pop stars have created a new and significant audience for MTV among teenage girls. Lewis explores this subculture of fandom and its effects on the music business. The videos of Benatar, Lauper, Turner, and Madonna, argues Lewis, foreground female experiences of gender inequality and celebrate the cultural distinctiveness of girls and women. By focusing attention on forms of gender discrimination in popular music, and in society generally, these four musicians have become figures of emulation for millions of female fans. "Girls Just Want to Have Fun," by Cyndi Lauper, became something of an anthem for women and particularly for female adolescents, a very regulated and marginalized group. Devotees of Lauper and of Madonna especially imitate their idols in appearance and speech. The fans are examined in the context of their everyday lives as teenage girls in various sites of fan activity-concerts, shopping malls, movies, television news, and MTV itself.

- Railton, Diane and Paul Watson. "Naughty Girls and Red Blooded Women Representations of Female Heterosexuality in Music Video." *Feminist Media Studies* 5.1 (2005): 51-63. Web. 25 July 2010.

Abstract: The article discusses issues related to *representation of female heterosexuality in music videos*. What the *video* for Can't Get You Out of My Head presents one with, then, is an image of *female* sexuality, which stands *in* stark contrast to the one produced by performer Beyonce Knowles' Baby Boy. While both produce images of the sexually attractive, seductive, heterosexual *woman*, these *representations of* sexuality and seduction are very different, and, *in* the end, are constituted through and over-determined by the limits of the raced imaginary. While on the one hand black *female* sexuality continues to be constructed as hypersexuality, as animalistic, primitive, and instinctive, on the other hand white *female* sexuality is defined principally *in* terms of its asexuality, that is to say, *in* terms of the rejection/colonization of instinctive behavior through/by culture and civilization. The *ferine* sexuality of the black *woman* renders

her always and already sexually available while, by contrast, the providence of the white *female* body secures both the white *woman's* unattainability and, by extension, her desirability.

Masculinity and Femininity in Sports Media:

- Caudwell, Jayne. "Girlfight and Bend it Like Beckham: Screening Women, Sport, and Sexuality." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 13. 3 (2009): 255-271. Web. 25 July 2010.

Abstract: In this article, sport film is taken as a social and cultural space where women's bodies are made publicly in/visible. Two films—*Girlfight* and *Bend it Like Beckham*—provide the focus for critical discussion. Moreover, a queer-feminist analysis explores the links between participation in boxing and football, and women's sexuality as represented in the films. Lesbian sexualities are considered in a critique of the erasure of the lesbian sport [film] star. Sexual subjectivity is also discussed in relation to the heterosexual heroic and to patriarchy. In this way I interrogate heterosexuality. I also consider links between ethnicity, women's bodies, and sexuality. In the final instance, I show that the films work to reproduce heterosexual hegemony and depict heteronormative assimilation.

- Evans, Bethan. "'I'd Feel Ashamed': Girls' Bodies and Sports Participation." *Gender, Place, and Culture* 13. 5 (2006): 547-561. Web. 22 November 2009.

Abstract: This article is concerned with the links between space, gender and adolescents' bodies. Drawing on data from both qualitative and quantitative research carried out with adolescents aged 13–16 in Liverpool, UK in 2001 the article examines girls' low participation rates in physical education (PE). Framed within theoretical work relating to the performance of corporeal femininities and 'inhibited intentionality' in reference to sporting confidence, girls' experiences of single-sex PE are compared with their perceptions of mixed PE in order to explore how the presence of boys may impact on girls' perceptions of their bodies and willingness to participate in sport. The results suggest that while girls still feel pressure from a male gaze to present their bodies to boys as passively beautiful, they also feel pressure to be competent at sport and thus present their bodies as active. However, single-sex PE does not provide a space where the male gaze is absent, suggesting this gaze has been internalized. This article explores the nature of school space in explaining differential participation rates, highlighting how sports within the space of the school, with an emphasis on competition and under the evaluative gaze of

teachers, intensify some girls' fears of inadequacy in sports. The findings illustrate the complexities and contradictions present within and between girls' experiences of their bodies and sports and the relationship between school space and adolescents' bodies.

- Nyong'o Tavia. "The Unforgivable Transgression of being Caster Semenya." *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 20. 1 (2010): 95-100. Web. 25 July 2010.

Abstract: The article explores the issues on racism and sexism in women sports associated with the winning of African sprinter Caster Semenya at the XII International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) World Championships in Athletics on August 2009 in Berlin, Germany. It says that Semenya was forced to undergo gender testing. It states that challenging the femaleness of Semenya was imperialism, as well as an especially shameful and traumatic humiliation for a teenager to experience.

Sexualization of Tween/Teen Culture:

- Lamb, Sharon and Lyn Mikel Brown. *Packaging Girlhood*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006. Print.

Summary: Sexy. Diva. Boy-crazy. Shopper. The image of girls and girlhood that is being packaged and sold to your daughter isn't pretty in pink. It's stereotypical, demeaning, limiting, and alarming. Girl Power has been co-opted by marketers of music, fashion, books, and television to mean the power to shop and attract boys. Girls are besieged by images in the media that encourage accessorizing over academics; sex appeal over sports; fashion over friends. *Packaging Girlhood* exposes these stereotypes and the very limited choices presented of who girls are and what they can be. Lamb and Brown give parents guidance on how to talk with their daughters about these negative images and aid them with tools on how to help girls make more positive choices about the way they are in the world. In the tradition of books like *Reviving Ophelia*, *Odd Girl Out*, and *Queen Bees and Wannabees* that examine the world of girls, this book promises to not only spark debate but help parents to empower their daughters.

- McAllister, Matthew P. "Girls with a Passion for Fashion: The Bratz Brand as Integrated Spectacular Consumption." *Journal of Children and Media* 1. 3 (2007): 244-258. Web. 24 March 2010.

Abstract: This article examines the consumption ethos in the Bratz brand and its implications for tween girl identity, arguing that it is an example of a theoretical concept labelled by the article as integrated spectacular consumption. After developing this concept, a brief review of the consumption orientation in girls' commodities, especially dolls, will be presented, followed by a description of the Bratz brand and the article's method. The analysis focuses on Bratz positioning as a consumption-based "lifestyle" brand through an emphasis on brand appearance, promotionally based media, and group consumption. It concludes by discussing some of the larger social implications of the Bratz brand for tween identity

- Stack, Michelle and Deidre M. Kelly. "Popular Media, Education, and Resistance." *Canadian Journal of Education* 29.1 (2006): 5-26. Web. 20 June 2010.

Abstract: Although the mainstream media and education systems are key institutions that perpetuate various social inequalities, spaces exist--both within and beyond these institutions--where adults and youth resist dominant, damaging representations and improvise new images. In this article, we address why educational researchers and educators should attend closely to popular media and democratizing media production. We analyze and illustrate strategies for engaging with and critiquing corporate news media and creating counter-narratives. We explore media education as a key process for engaging people in dialogue and action as well as present examples of how popular culture texts can be excavated as rich pedagogical resources.



