



A QuEST
FOR HEALTH
PROGRAM

MEDIA
LITERACY

SECTION 1

MEDIA LITERACY – Overview

OBJECTIVES

- Break the ice for students
- Learn about media literacy and talk about influences of media messages
- Introduce concepts of self-esteem and body image

QUESTION

ACTIVITY: Media Hype!/Analyzing Media Images

Activity time: 5 min.

What is media?

How many ads do you think a person can be exposed to in one day?

Do you think you are influenced by the media?

Do you know what media literacy is?

EDUCATE and EMPOWER!

ACTIVITY: Media Hype!/Analyzing Media Images

Activity time: 20 min.

Materials needed: Media images of magazine covers and advertisements

Overhead 1: Media images that portray **IDEAL IMAGES**

Overhead 2: Media images that portray **BODY PARTS**

Overhead 3: Media images that portray **MIXED MESSAGES**

Overhead 4: Media images that portray **SEXUALITY**

Overhead 5: Media images that portray **PERFECTIONISM**

Overhead 6: Media images that portray **DIVERSITY**

Please be mindful of the visual content of pictures, as ads can be extreme and graphic. Our intention is to choose pictures that illustrate our point without bombarding people with too many ideal images, that may be triggering for people to look at, which defeats the purpose of the activity. Choose pictures that students can focus on to critically analyze. If time is limited choose ads that best reflect the audience. However, be sure to contrast #1 and #6.

STRATEGIZE and TALK ABOUT CHOICES

Taking an active and informed approach to the media: Media Activism

Activity time: 10 min.

Overhead 7: Sample letter by media watch

TOTAL TIME: 35 MIN.

QUESTION

Ask the audience the following questions:

“What are some examples of media?”

Examples of media include: advertisements, T.V, movies, billboards, music, videos, internet, newspapers and fashion magazines.

“How many ads do you think an average person can be exposed to in one day?”

Research indicates that the average American is exposed to at least 3,000 ads in one day (Kilbourne, 1999).

“Do you think you are influenced by the media?”

Many people don't think they are affected by the media. However, there is a \$200 billion advertising industry and studies report that an average person (American statistic) spends approximately 3 years watching T.V. commercials over a lifetime (Kilbourne, 1999).

Messages in the media provoke individual attention and interpretation and can affect people in different ways depending on their developmental stage, personality, immediate situation and other sociocultural factors (Vandereycken & Noordenbos, 1998).

- Media can have a powerful influence on our attitudes, culture and environment.
- Advertising is our environment. We swim in it like fish swim in water (Kilbourne, 1999).
- Advertising companies have a purpose: to sell products. We are bombarded by images in the media and ads that tell us we need to buy products to change our appearance in order to be happy, successful and popular.
- The most **IMPORTANT** thing you can do is **QUESTION MESSAGES** in the media. Make a choice. Will you allow the media to affect you?

“Do you know what media literacy is?”

Media literacy is a skill that you can learn to be able to read the media (images/ messages) with a critical, smart and informed attitude.

Media literacy does NOT mean “don't watch”, it means watch carefully, think critically.

Media literacy does NOT mean bashing the media (Center for Media Literacy, 2003).

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ACTIVITY SUMMARY: Media Hype!/Analyzing Media Images

Use the following activity to analyze media images:

STEP 1. Find pictures that are appropriate for your age group from recent magazines. Be careful of choosing pictures which are too graphic. Show pictures or make overheads in sequence from #1-6. (See pg. 12-17 for examples.)

#1 Ideals: models on the covers of any fashion/fitness magazine

#2 Body parts: ads that feature body parts to sell products

#3 Mixed messages: covers of magazines that feature food and diets

#4 Sexuality: ads that use sexuality to sell products (alcohol, perfume)

#5 Perfection: computer retouching and airbrushing techniques

#6 Diversity: ads with a variety of sizes, heights, races and abilities

Contrast diversity with ideal images.

(Note: it is very difficult to find ads with diversity in fashion magazines).

STEP 2. For each picture or ad ask questions:

What do you notice about the ads?

What messages are ads sending?

How does this make you feel?

EMPOWER!

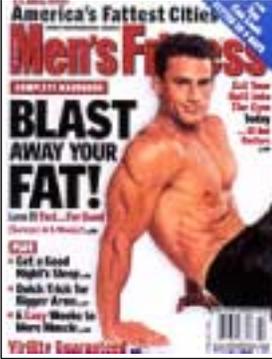
STEP 3. Emphasize that not all media is negative.

Encourage students to question ads, and media images and messages.

Seeing is not always believing!

EDUCATE and EMPOWER!

OVERHEAD 1: IDEALS
How many people do you know who look like this?




*What message is being sent by using ideal images vs. realistic images?
 How does this make you FEEL?*

IDEALS = Message: There is only ONE way to be attractive

Ideal images create an extremely narrow message of what is attractive for males and females. Did you know that different cultures praise bodies of different shapes and sizes?

What is the danger in creating an ideal image?

The media often associates “ideal images” with being attractive, wealthy, popular and happy. The message is: If you look a certain way, you will be happy and successful in life. Ideal images are illusions, **not** reality. Did you know the average American woman wears a size 12-14?

Let’s analyze the ideal image for males and females

Race: Most models on the cover of magazines are Caucasian and if they are of another race e.g. Tyra Banks, they often have Caucasian features, such as lighter skin or are actresses.

Age: Most models are young. You rarely see ads featuring people of different ages. One study found that of 290 faces identified in one issue of Vogue magazine, only one woman appeared over 50 (Maine, 2000).

Weight/Shape: Most models have the same body shape (Females = tall, thin, big bust and small waist. Males = tall, muscular, lean, broad shoulders and six pack stomach).

Gender: Females are often wearing sexy clothing and often portrayed in positions of vulnerability, looking weak and passive. Males are often portrayed in ads as strong, powerful and active (Kilbourne, 1999).

How does this make you feel?

People may feel unattractive, not good enough, depressed, insecure and/or feel they need to change in order to be happy.

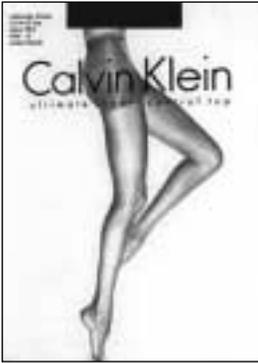
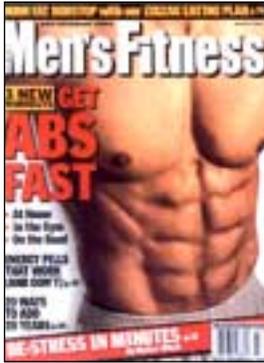
Selling strategy: If people feel unattractive, they will buy products to change.

EMPOWER!

Don’t question why YOU are DIFFERENT, question why IMAGES are the SAME!

EDUCATE and EMPOWER!

OVERHEAD 2: BODY PARTS
Do you ever wish you could change a part of your body?
Do you ever wonder why?

What message is being sent by using body parts vs. a whole person?
How does this make you FEEL?

BODY PARTS = Message: Objectification — We are parts to be looked at!

Ads show parts of a person's body to sell a product, not the whole person. Look in any fashion magazine and you will find a product for almost EVERY part of the body (mostly for females, but increasingly for males). These ads emphasize that all parts need improvement.

In what way could these ads be sending harmful messages to people?

When ads focus on perfectly sculpted body parts to promote products, people start to look at their own bodies as parts, and usually in a negative manner (e.g. "big thighs", "big gut"). Ads that focus on body parts send messages that parts of the body are objects to be looked at, and these messages dehumanize people (Kilbourne, 1999).

How does this make you feel?

People may begin to feel self-conscious, dissatisfied, negative about their own body parts or objectified/less human.

Selling strategy: If people feel badly about parts of their bodies they may try harmful products to reshape their bodies (e.g. diets, steroids, surgery, gadgets).

The American Society of Plastic Surgeons reported 24,623 cosmetic-surgery procedures on teens in the U.S in 1998. Statistics are similar in Canada (Friedman, 2002).

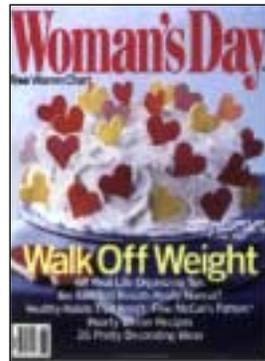
EMPOWER!

Don't turn your body into an object. You are a whole person!
Changing a part of your body will not change your life; changing your attitude will!

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OVERHEAD 3: MIXED MESSAGES

What message are they sending?



What do you notice about the message on the cover of the magazine?

How does this make you FEEL?

MIXED MESSAGES = Message: If you eat, you need to diet!

How many times have you seen commercials and ads that contradict each other? Have you noticed that the cover of a magazine might promote weight loss and eating (e.g. decadent cake) simultaneously? Also, ads promise “quick tips” for changing your body opposite unrealistic body images. People influenced by media and advertising become confused about health and nutrition issues.

What is the danger of bombarding people with mixed messages in advertising?

One problem is that food is made into a moral issue. People are bombarded with messages that food is either “good” or “bad” or that it is either a “sin” to eat certain foods or that people should “indulge” (Kilbourne, 1999). Be aware! Advice in magazines about “crash” dieting and nutrition is often not written by health care professionals.

How do these ads make people feel?

People influenced by these contradicting messages may feel confused, “guilty” for eating, or feel they need to lose weight because they eat.

Selling strategy: Bombard people with mixed messages to sell products and ideas.

EMPOWER!

NEVER feel “guilty” for eating food

EDUCATE and EMPOWER!

OVERHEAD 4: SEXUALITY
What exactly are they selling here?



What is the message being sold here?
How does this make you FEEL?

SEXUALITY = Message: If you buy our product, you will be attractive!

From beer ads, to cars, to soft drinks, sex is one of the most common messages used to sell a product, whether the product has anything to do with sex or not! Can you tell what they are trying to sell in these ads?

What is the danger of selling sex?

Ads often send false ideas, illusions and fantasies about how to be sexy, attractive, happy and popular (e.g. by drinking and smoking, having white teeth, wearing perfume). Males are often portrayed in powerful strong positions and females are often portrayed in vulnerable, child-like and degrading positions (Kilbourne, 1999).

How does this make you feel?

People may compare their own lives and relationships to ads/media and feel undesirable or undeserving of happiness because they do not fit these images (Kilbourne, 1999).

Selling strategy: If you buy a product, you can be happy, sexy, attractive and popular like the people in these images.

EMPOWER!

Ads are often selling MORE than just the product!

**Don't buy into ads that try to sell relationships, sexuality, popularity and happiness.
 These are all things that cannot be bought!**

EDUCATE and EMPOWER!

OVERHEAD 5: PERFECTION
Do you ever wish you could look like a star?



*What do you notice about these before and after shots?
 How does this make you FEEL?*

PERFECTION = Message: We are not good enough the way we are!

There is no such thing as being perfect/flawless. Some models on the cover of magazines do not even exist! For example, the model on the cover of Mirabella magazine was created using computer techniques. Features of different women were used to create a totally fake woman! (Kilbourne, 1995).

Photographers use airbrushing, lighting, and computer retouching to change ANY part of the body (e.g. take away blemishes, make people look taller, thinner or muscular, have higher cheekbones, washboard stomach, whiter teeth, etc.). Before taking a picture, models spend hours on their appearance and their clothes are often pinned to fit them perfectly. Many models have had plastic surgery to change their bodies.

What is the danger of promoting the illusion of perfection?

The fashion, cosmetic, exercise and diet industries continue to make money because people will buy products to try to attain the impossible.

How do these pictures make people feel?

People may feel better to realize that stars are just people like you and me. People are not perfect, not even celebrities!

EMPOWER!

The more you realize the truth behind the fashion/modeling industry, the more you can protect your own self-esteem and body image. No one is perfect!

If looking at fashion/fitness magazines makes you feel bad, don't buy them... learn about something that makes you feel good.

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OVERHEAD 6: DIVERSITY
Diversity is amazing!



*What do you notice about these ads?
How does this make you FEEL?*

DIVERSITY = Message: Celebrate all races, cultures, body shapes and sizes, and abilities that represent REAL people!

By having ads that represent a variety of people, the view of what is attractive becomes more broad and inclusive. We should celebrate the unique beauty, talents and characteristics of people of different cultures. However, we are shown only one way females and males should behave and look to be attractive. It is important to be surrounded by messages that include, not exclude and lift us up, not bring us down!

How does this make you feel?

Empowered, inspired, accepting of all shapes, sizes, races, ages and abilities.



EMPOWER! QUESTION MEDIA IMAGES!

Make a choice: Will YOU CONTROL how media messages affect you or will media CONTROL YOU?

STRATEGIZE and TALK ABOUT CHOICES

Discuss with the audience: **Link to eating disorders**

Does media really affect us? Media images do not cause eating disorders, but they can influence the way people feel about themselves and their appearance. A study in Fiji found that before the island had television people were happy with their bodies and there was little talk of dieting. Women had large, round bodies which were considered beautiful and attractive in their culture.

However, in 1995, television was introduced, with Western shows featuring thin body ideals. Within three years, the number of teens at-risk for eating disorders more than doubled, 74% of teens said they felt “too big” and 62% said they dieted in the last month (Kilbourne, 1999).

Ask the audience: **“What can we do about media influences?”**

Discuss strategies:

- ✓ Next time you look around **QUESTION MESSAGES** in media images
- ✓ **EMPOWER** your friends/family about media literacy: praise unique, smart ads and protest against unhealthy images
- ✓ **CHANGE YOUR ATTITUDE** about the images that surround you
- ✓ **CHOOSE** not to buy fashion/exercise magazines if they make you feel bad
- ✓ **MODELS SHOULD NOT** be our role models!
- ✓ **ACCEPT** yourself and others for being different!
- ✓ **MEDIA ACTIVISM!**

How many of you think you will look at the media differently now?
Think about your rights and responsibilities. Think about media activism.

What is media activism?

It is the effort to change the messages that are portrayed by the media (Friedman, 2002).

Follow-up activity: Write a letter!

In 1998, a petition and letter writing campaign was initiated by the ANAD organization (Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders) to protest the Hershey’s Food Corporation advertisement of a chocolate bar with the slogan “You can never be too rich or too thin”. The company withdrew the ad (Friedman, 2002).

Get together with friends and take action.

You have the choice and ability to make positive changes.

MEDIA ACTIVISM: Websites to help you make a change

www.about-face.org

There is a “gallery of offenders” section where you can get the name and address of almost ANY magazine/fashion designer to send your letter.

www.mediawatch.ca

- Tips on how to write a letter
- There is a place to submit an ad you like or don't like
- There are a number of real examples of letters sent to various producers/ad agencies to “rant” or “rave”, with positive results.

Check out these sites, then submit your opinion.

Sample letter (reprinted with permission granted from Media Watch):

www.mediawatch.ca
 517 Wellington St. W.,
 Suite 204
 Toronto, ON M5V 1G1
 Tel: 416-408-2065



Dear Ms. Dallal:

In a transit ad for Fetish perfume, a white, blond, very young and very thin woman is featured sporting the typical blank, passive look, pouting mouth and make-up bruised eyes. Her neck and face are strewn with sparkles (presumably where the perfume would be applied) and the ad copy reads **“Fetish #16: Apply generously to your neck so he can smell the scent, as you shake your head “no”.**

The imagery in this ad is very disturbing. No Means No campaigners have been working hard to create an understanding of sexual consent and to illuminate the reality of date rape. The imagery implies that women are constantly sexual and that they like being able to turn a man on only to say NO. This feeds the idea that rape victims are actually asking for it and contributes to a reduction in tolerance of the very real problem of violence against women.

Sincerely,

c.c. Houbigant (Fetish), Toronto Transit Commission,
 Vancouver Transit, MediaWatch

RESULT: The Advertising Standards Council (ASC) ruled that the Fetish ad violated their advertising Code of Ethics. The advertiser voluntarily withdrew the advertisement when notified of the consumer complaint, before the ASC Council heard the complaint.