

Expose the Illusions, Crack the Codes: Contextualizing Visual Media to Mold a New Reality

Cover Girl Culture: Awakening the Media Generation. By Nicole Clark, New York, Women Make Movies, 2009. 80 min. \$295.00 (University Price). www.wmm.com.
and The Codes of Gender: Identity & Performance in Popular Culture. By Sut Jhally, Northampton, Mass., Media Education Foundation, 2009. 72 min. (unabridged), 46 min. (abridged). \$275.00 (University Price). ISBN: 1-932869-39-5. www.mediaed.org

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This article provides a comprehensive review of two films that analyze how and to what effect displays of gendered body ideals in the media impact body image and a wide spectrum of behaviors among viewers. While there were obvious differences in the contextual background, content, and approach of these two films, both films highlight the pervasive sexualization, objectification, and dehumanization of women in visual media—and how we might be able to tackle such entrenched social constructions of gender and gendered bodies. We thus combined our presentation of the reviews below, discussing each in turn, to offer a comparative yet integrated approach to evaluating what they have to offer, both separately and cumulatively.

Exposing the Illusions: *Cover Girl Culture*

Fashion magazines marketed for girls and women attempt to sell an illusory lifestyle characterized by glamour, wealth, and success that can be earned through purchasing products as well as being thin and hypersexual (Bessenoff 2006; Morry and Staska 2001). These magazines, which include a heavy dose of advertisements mixed with a sprinkling of articles and editorials, represent a concentrat-

ed microcosm of a larger cultural issue: the permission to sexually objectify and restrict girls and women (Calogero et al. 2011; Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Via the media, young girls learn that their looks are important to their identity (Bartky 1990) and may begin to perceive and describe themselves by their appearance rather than their internal aspects, such as their personality, intellect, and generosity (Aubrey 2006). This tendency, referred to as *self-objectification* (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997, p. 179), is connected with many detrimental mental health issues, such as poor self-esteem, body shame, and disordered eating (Aubrey 2010; Morry and Staska 2001; Turner et al. 1997). In the documentary, *Cover Girl Culture: Awakening the Media Generation*, director Nicole Clark exposes the lifestyle advocated in fashion magazines as illusory and reveals the many mental health and societal problems that could result from girls' exposure to these images.

Clark, a former Elite international fashion model and ongoing advocate for girls' self-esteem, has a campaign to alert the audience to (a) the marketing motives, messages, and strategies embedded in fashion magazines; (b) how girls are affected by these fashion magazines; and (c) ways to champion a positive change for girls' mental health. Clark's modus operandi includes interviews which alternate between girls who have internalized media messages; girls who challenge these messages; fashion, modeling, and marketing executives who promote and rationalize these messages; and body image therapists, coaches, and authors who highlight the destructiveness of these messages. A motivational speaker, mayor, cosmetic/reconstructive surgeon, and several models are also interviewed. The oscillation between interviews is skillfully arranged to

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highlight broad themes and contradictory viewpoints. Media images of models are interwoven within and between interviews to reinforce or even refute interview content. Viewers do not see Clark, and her questions are either absent or barely audible in order to direct the spotlight on the words and expressions of the individuals being interviewed.

Clark's inclusion of media images of models is similar to the analytic technique used by Jean Kilbourne in *Killing Us Softly 4* (Kilbourne and Jhally 2010) and Mary Pipher in *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (Pipher et al. 1998). Specifically, a large collection of media images are presented and examined with a critical eye, raising viewers' awareness that these images sell more than products: a circumscribed vision of beauty, values, success, sexuality, and normalcy. All three films reveal that the mass media socialize young girls to believe that they must spend an enormous amount of time, energy, and money to achieve the look contained in media images, and it is emphasized that they feel ashamed and guilty when they fail. Kilbourne takes this discourse a step further, discussing how girls' failure to achieve this image is inevitable—pictures of models are “photoshopped” and “airbrushed” to appear flawless so even the models do not look like the images based on them. All three films discuss the media's sexualization of young girls and the deleterious consequences of this practice.

The main difference between *Cover Girl Culture* and the two earlier films, *Killing Us Softly 4* and *Reviving Ophelia*, is the presentation style. Kilbourne and Pipher serve as visible narrators who address their points in a very direct manner, while Clark presents a collection of voices from varied individuals who address their points in a more poignant, and at times, personal manner. Clark's method allows her to position statements from executives who work in the fashion and marketing industry against body image experts and media images that refute their claims, allowing viewers to see that these executives may “talk the talk” but do not “walk the walk.” In addition, Clark's interviews portray the perspectives of girls ranging in age from 6 to 18, showing viewers how entrenched these ideas of beauty and image have become in the minds of very young girls. For example, Kailey, 11 years of age with a full set of acrylic nails and a heavily made up face, already identifies herself as a compulsive shopper.

Clark, Kilbourne, and Pipher share the overarching goal of deciphering images by teaching media literacy. This strategy allows viewers to develop and reinforce a *contextualization schema* in girls—one that identifies the problem as societal rather than individual (Tylka and Augustus-Horvath 2011). When distressed from viewing media images, girls who have a contextualization schema *contextualize* the blame, or place the onus of their distress

on the media for creating unrealistic images and manipulating consumers to associate these images with good fortune, wealth, health, and happiness. They are aware that the media create an illusion of a perfect body to sell products, but realize that no one can achieve this illusion. If girls do not have a contextualization schema, then they likely *internalize* the blame, channeling this negativity onto their bodies and self for failing to achieve this flawless image. Clark and Pipher, however, add a dimension not discussed by Kilbourne: to “mold a new reality” for girls. Influential others, such as parents and teachers, can offset media's messages and deconstruct media's effects on girls' well-being.

Although *Cover Girl Culture* is not divided into chapters, main themes emerge. The first theme demonstrates that girls can and do internalize media images and do so in the absence of a contextualization schema. The documentary begins with showing various thin models and celebrities in advertisements and on the runway and stage. Viewers hear background music and whispers such as “get them while they're young,” “who defines what's beautiful?” and “who is your target audience?” representing underlying messages that go unnoticed without a contextualization schema. Clark then asks girls, “If you could change something about yourself, what would you change?” They reply with features of their appearance, with many stating that others want them to be thinner. They dissect their bodies, mentioning parts they do not like. One girl expresses, “When I see celebrities in magazines, I don't feel very worthy of myself.” Audrey Brashich, an author of a media literacy guide, explains that it is useful for girls to see photographs of celebrities without makeup or before digital modification; however, she notes that girls then scrutinize the appearance of these celebrities and turn the scrutiny back on themselves. She reveals that this practice reinforces girls to judge all females, including themselves, on their physical appearance.

No one assumes responsibility for the negative effects of girls' internalization of the thin ideal, which is the second theme in this documentary. Various individuals in the modeling and fashion industry are represented in *Cover Girl Culture*, with each deflecting responsibility. A modeling agent states that he is not to blame for girls' negative body image. Rather, he chooses who his clients want to book, and if he does not provide thin girls for his clients, then they will go to his competitor. A model suggests that models are not to blame, as they are conforming to the standards set by the fashion and magazine editors. One fashion editor indicates that she blames Hollywood. Although fashion executives for *Teen Vogue* acknowledge their power to set trends, they argue that they are not responsible for girls' negative body image, because they choose “real girls” who are “healthy” with “big smiles” and

are “not too skinny.” They assert that they care about their readers’ health, and mention their magazine’s various articles on girls’ health and misuse of dieting as well as messages to “be the best you can be” and “love your body.” Their voices remain audible as Clark exposes very thin expressionless models from *Teen Vogue* that blatantly contradict the fashion executives’ statements. Body image authors, coaches, and a girls’ media literacy group state emphatically that positive body image articles are nullified by the advertisements appearing in the magazine. An adolescent-focused psychotherapist is shown asserting that for every one negative message sent, it requires seven positive messages to counteract it. Clark demonstrates that in *Teen Vogue*, the number of advertisements represents approximately two-thirds of the content and overwhelms the number of articles, suggesting a strong negative impact for readers is very likely.

The fashion editors in *Cover Girl Culture* argue that their magazine images provide an “incredible fantastical element” that is inspirational for girls and women. One remarks, “Women project themselves into the fantasy pages of what they would like to see for themselves. The magic of that exercise is very joyful, fulfilling, and rewarding.” This fashion editor then indicates that eating disorders are due to past sexual abuse, not media images. Connie Sobczak, a body image expert in the film, passionately addresses the absurdity of this fashion editor’s statements by arguing, “You’re projecting a dream for women to go after that you know they can never achieve, and you’re calling that joy?” Other body image experts in the film also remark that the fashion editor’s reasoning is inaccurate, stating that reading fashion magazines creates a body comparing dynamic—girls are left feeling badly when their bodies do not match models’ bodies. The body image experts’ statements are supported by anecdotal evidence offered by several girls in the film as well as empirical research (Bessenoff 2006; Durkin and Paxton 2002; Groesz et al. 2002).

Why do those in the fashion industry interpret what is “healthy” and “realistic” for girls differently than body image experts and media literacy groups? While not explicitly addressed in *Cover Girl Culture*, one explanation is that those who work in the fashion industry may experience cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957). If individuals are doing something potentially harmful, it causes an uncomfortable state, or dissonance, that they are motivated to dissipate. To reduce dissonance, they minimize the harm from their actions through justification, denial, defensiveness, and externalization. Therefore, working in an industry that perpetuates the thin ideal could instigate beliefs that exposing girls to thin models is inspirational, produces joy, and advocates a healthy and fit lifestyle.

If reading magazines makes girls feel badly about their bodies, why do they do it? The body image experts featured

in this film explain that girls are searching for meaning, a sense of belonging, respect, and recognition, which is the third theme. Sobczak reflects that girls search for something that is going to give them what they need to be popular to stop their pain, shame, and humiliation. She continues, “The magazine promises ‘if you follow our rules, you’re going to be one of those girls who get everything.’” She expresses that girls are “searching for meaning; yet, they are chasing after something that is complete fluff.” Deb Burgard, a psychologist, suggests that when adults do not provide girls with a sense of direction—that happiness comes from the inside, not through physical metamorphosis—girls are going to turn to the media for direction. She adds that girls want respect and recognition, and society tells girls that modeling is one interesting, cool, and lucrative way to attain respect and recognition. This is illustrated in the film by a pre-adolescent girl stating, “The reason why I want to be a fashion model is that people look up to you.” Clark then asks the girl, “What else makes you feel this way?” The girl shrugs her shoulders, unable to generate an answer. Misty Tripoli, an athlete and body image coach, emphasizes in this film that media instruct girls that they gain recognition from being rich, scandalous, and having an eating disorder, as these people often are featured on magazine covers.

The fourth theme of *Cover Girl Culture* reflects the corporate agenda: seeing girls as the “new market.” Points are made that advertisers realize that girls now have financial power within their family, and marketers want to keep them in states of want and need, which can be achieved by making appearance the primary goal and keeping them dissatisfied with their appearance. Brashich mentions that she instructs girls that magazines cannot advertise messages such as “you look great how you are” because, for example, major makeup companies finance the magazine and want them to buy makeup. This helps, viewers see that the advertisements’ very narrow image of success and beauty fuels girls’ desire and need for products. An 18-year-old girl in the film indicates that advertisers are “keen on making us feel that we can’t live up to society’s ideal perfection, so that we can never quite obtain what they’re trying to sell us, so we’ll keep buying more and trying more things to try to live up to their expectations.” Throughout this discussion, Clark shows various advertisements featuring weight loss products and cosmetic procedures as well as articles that instruct readers how to “fix” each body area.

The fifth theme of *Cover Girl Culture* reveals that Western media assign “body projects” to women in order to preoccupy their time and energy while restricting their health, well-being, and freedom; this is done to maintain the patriarchal status quo and women’s position as sexual objects. In the film, Brashich compares this to the same

technique used to get women to return home after they worked in World War II; media made the homemaker role seem really appealing in advertisements and television shows. Clark parallels “body projects” occurring throughout history—such as corsets and the foot binding of women in China—with current cosmetic surgery procedures. Advertisements and articles are shown, such as “A woman’s work is never done,” encouraging women to focus on appearance and self-objectify. Ironically, the cosmetic/reconstructive surgeon in the film laments, “If you’re worried about how you look, you’re not putting effort into who you are and what you are.”

The sixth theme within *Cover Girl Culture* underscores that media expose young girls to sex. Clark provides several examples of this, including bras marketed for girls as young as age six and lingerie pages for preteen girls contained in the middle of *Victoria’s Secret* catalogues. Sobczak reveals that, in an issue of *Seventeen*, a free panty coupon (with a young girl modeling the panty) was featured underneath a row of guys with their shirts off. She indicates that girls interpret this as “to get one of those hot sexy guys, I have to wear the sexy panties” and then become customers of *Victoria’s Secret*. While a *Teen Vogue* fashion director in the film remarks, “We don’t advertise sex in our magazine; it’s not appropriate,” Clark shows viewers many sexual advertisements featured in *Teen Vogue*.

The last theme found in *Cover Girl Culture* addresses how adults can bring about positive change. Clark lets the body image experts answer. The experts agree that adults cannot rely on the corporate-driven media to champion positive change; instead, adults need to buffer media’s influences. Because young girls are exposed to advertisements before their critical thinking skills develop, the experts assert that adults need to counter negative media messages by “feeding” girls positive information about their bodies and “leading” them towards an understanding of advertisers’ motives. Experts declare that media literacy can help girls decipher advertising images, so they can choose which messages they retain and which messages they walk away from. For instance, adults can discuss with girls the messages hidden in the positioning of advertisements, the use of sex to sell products, and that advertisers have a mission to make individuals dissatisfied with themselves in order to sell products. Reinforcing this last point, the cosmetic surgeon interviewed in this film admits that if girls and women had higher self-esteem, then he would likely be out of work. The experts mention that adults can help guide girls to choose their friends and significant others based on whether they build their self-esteem rather than pull it down. They emphasize that adults need to work with young girls to guide the development of their inner character; otherwise, girls will go to the corporate sources and work on their external appearance.

Several experts express that mothers need to recognize that their quest to change their appearance is harming their daughters, as girls will model their mother’s behaviors and attitudes toward her body. The experts recommend that mothers role model healthy self-esteem and joy of living life in their own body, projecting the message to their daughters that they do not need certain products or to look like the cultural ideal to love themselves. At the very end, Clark plays a *Rush* song that epitomizes the theme that adults need to champion this positive change, suggesting that those “who hold high places, must be the ones who start, to mold a new reality, closer to the heart” (Lee et al. 1977, track 3).

Overall, *Cover Girl Culture* can be used to raise girls’ and women’s awareness of the underlying messages contained in media images and how they influence their purchasing decisions, image of themselves, and overall mental health. While this film discusses media literacy, one important component largely missing from the dialogue is that photographs of models are digitally modified. It is imperative that girls and women understand that pictures of models are altered to appear flawless—wrinkles and pimples are erased, arms and thighs are streamlined, stomach is reduced, etc. Also, it would have been helpful if this film was divided into chapters so that teachers and professors who do not have time to show the entire 80-min film may be able to show a few chapters that address the points in their lesson plan or curriculum. Despite these limitations, educators who have a goal of discussing media impacts, media literacy, self-objectification, body image, and eating disorders would find *Cover Girl Culture* to be a valuable supplement to their lectures on these topics.

Cracking the Codes: *The Codes of Gender*

In the visual media, gender differences are evident in the body types presented as ideal for women and men. For men, the body ideal is mesomorphic, characterized by muscularity coupled with low body fat (Ridgeway and Tylka 2005). In contrast, the body ideal for women is very thin coupled with large breasts (Harrison 2003). Researchers often study the effects of exposure of these ideals on viewers’ body image and psychological functioning (Bessenoff 2006; Groesz et al. 2002), but largely have ignored how gender is displayed and performed within these images. For example, a mesomorphic male model is most often portrayed as powerful, grounded, focused, and looking straight at the observer, letting this observer know that he should not be messed with (Jhally 2009). The thin female model, however, is depicted as distracted, submissive, off-balance, nervous, and looking away from the observer, letting this observer know that she could easily be

violated. Thus, the display of men's and women's bodies is qualitatively different and occurs within *codes of gender*, which are expectations and portrayals of gender already present within a culture. Ironically, codes of gender are distilled and exaggerated in the visual media but are so deeply ingrained that they often go unquestioned and unnoticed by viewers and researchers alike. Quite distinct from *Cover Girl Culture* and similar educational films centering on the effects of being exposed to the gendered body ideal, Sut Jhally's *The Codes of Gender: Identity and Performance in Popular Culture* offers an in-depth analysis of how gender is portrayed and performed in advertising.

Jhally, a Professor of Communication at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, narrates the film, candidly discussing the codes of gender so that viewers are able to recognize them and how they are communicated within the visual media. He uses the late sociologist Erving Goffman's (1979) book, *Gender Advertisements*, as the foundation to reveal what advertising "tells us about ourselves." Throughout the DVD, Jhally demonstrates that the content of *Gender Advertisements* is as valid and accurate in today's media as it was 33 years ago. He reveals that the codes of gender, while exaggerated in media, are depictions of reality in Western culture and therefore look normal—not strange or weird—to its members. Jhally "cracks the codes" so to speak, making them visible when they appear to be invisible or at least below conscious perception. Throughout the film, he takes viewers on a journey whereby they become visual anthropologists, looking at the images from an analytical distance to see the body posture, expressions, and positioning of the characters in gender-specific ways. Many advertisements, as well as a few television and movie segments, are presented in succession at a fairly rapid pace, used to skillfully illustrate his point that these codes are displayed in a ubiquitous manner. The gendered portrayals and the peculiarity of the images then become obvious, and expectations for what Western culture holds up as normal displays for women and men are exposed. Although the film's focus is not directly on how these gendered portrayals shape behavior, viewers may begin to realize that they have unwittingly internalized these codes and expressed them in their own behavior.

Despite several key differences, *The Codes of Gender* does share features with *Cover Girl Culture* (Clark 2009) as well as *Killing Us Softly 4* (Kilbourne and Jhally 2010). All three films acknowledge cultural influences in shaping the content of the advertisements, critically examine a large collection of media images in order to raise viewers' awareness of the messages contained within the images, and emphasize that these messages are prevalent, quick, cumulative, and subconscious. As described earlier, *Cover Girl Culture* allows the audience to hear various girls, mental health professionals, fashion editors, models, and

athletes speak about the messages contained in advertisements and their consequences for girls' body image, well-being, and authenticity; ideas are included for how adults can work to prevent negative effects from these images. *Killing Us Softly 4* jointly analyzes visual images with their textual message to provide a more holistic interpretation of its overall impact as well as displays valuable information on the frequency and destructiveness of viewing media images. Only *The Codes of Gender* comprehensively analyzes the visual displays of models—body posture, expressions, body positioning—and how these displays parallel gender role expectations rooted in culture. Because each film takes a unique slant on the visual media, they are incremental—that is, all three films could be used within a course to more comprehensively educate students on gendered messages within visual media, the potential negative effects of viewing these textual and visual messages on well-being, and how to intervene to combat these negative effects.

The Codes of Gender is divided into nine segments. In the full 72-min version, each segment ranges from five and a half to slightly over 11 min in length. A nice feature of this film is that it comes in an abridged version, which is 46 min in length. This version covers the same segments and content of the full version, but has been edited to remove some media examples, violence, and most nudity. While educators could select only certain segments to show their class, the overall message may not be as powerful; all segments build off of one another to create a cohesive gestalt. Yet, the main theme is included within each segment: if the image is consistent with cultural expectations of gender, then it appears to be "normal" to onlookers; however, if the codes of gender are broken or mixed within an image (i.e., men are presented in feminine roles, women in masculine roles), then onlookers take a second glance and react uncomfortably—showing that we have unconsciously internalized codes of gender display. In each segment, Jhally encourages viewers to imagine men in the same contorted body postures as women and monitor their reactions.

The first segment, the Introduction, provides an overview of how Western society categorizes gender into male and female and does not tolerate inconsistencies or ambiguities from this dichotomy. Jhally makes the connection that individuals are so eager to classify people as male or female because they think they need this information to know how to interact with them, as Western culture treats gender as an integral part of a person's identity. Therefore, if individuals want to "fit in," they have to learn how to transmit the "right" (i.e., gender-consistent) signals and interpret those signals transmitted by others.

In the second segment, Sex and Gender, Jhally defines and discusses these terms. Western media uses sex and

gender interchangeably and assumes they are biological (Muehlenhard and Peterson 2011). Jhally mentions that the dual (male vs. female) categorization downplays similarities between men and women as well as differences between men and differences between women. He points out that the result of this practice is that individuals assume that there is only one normal way to be feminine and only one normal way to be masculine. In this segment, viewers begin to understand that both masculinity and femininity, while portrayed as mutually exclusive in Western culture, are needed to fully understand each other's cultural meaning (e.g., powerful can only be understood in relation to powerless). Viewers see that gendered portrayals of male and female characters closely parallel these gender role characteristics in their posture, expressions, and positioning.

Jhally argues that gender is a social construction: we learn to adopt attributes and behaviors that the culture deems appropriate for our gender, i.e., the codes of gender. He notes that these codes guide our presentation of self, behavior, and style of communication; they are embedded within us to such an extent that they appear natural. Therefore, it is difficult to recognize these codes in operation, unless they are pointed out. Jhally instructs viewers that the codes of gender are distilled and used to present a world in ways that could be real. He reveals that they go unnoticed because they are a deep aspect of individual identity and appear to be an enhanced version of reality—they only appear strange when individuals become visual anthropologists, looking at them carefully and contemplating what Western culture holds up as normal.

The third segment, *The Feminine Touch*, addresses the codes of gender represented in the display of hands. Jhally demonstrates that, in the media, female hands submit to the environment by merely cradling objects, tracing the outline of objects, or using the fingertips to hold objects in a delicate fashion; hence, the feminine touch is tentative and decorative. Jhally notes that women in the media use their hands to touch themselves, which conveys the message that the body is delicate and precious. While holding themselves protectively, women often assume a breathless posture, which Jhally argues signifies that the world is too much for them to cope with and conveys a sense of passivity and acquiescence to the surround. Viewers see the contrast in the portrayal of men's hands. Jhally shows that men's hands mold the environment by grasping and taking control of objects and remarks that the masculine touch is powerful, assertive, utilitarian, controlling, commanding, firm, and bold.

The fourth segment, *The Ritualization of Subordination*, emphasizes how female bodies in advertising are used to demonstrate that women and femininity have a subordinate relationship to men and masculinity. Jhally notes the

ritualization of subordination in the positioning of women's and men's bodies. Specifically, women typically are shown lying down in a recumbent position, unable to defend themselves against potential threats in their surround. They commonly stand in "canting postures" such as "the bashful knee-bend," the "head cant," and lifting their head upwards to expose their neck. Jhally mentions that these positions tilt the body, placing women "off-center" and ungrounded, unable to react quickly and firmly. Sometimes, women are posed beneath men or with their torso twisted/bent, such as holding their foot or shoe heel, leaving them teetering, vulnerable, and defenseless. Jhally makes the point that onlookers interpret these postures as expressions of sexual availability, subordination, and appeasement while equating women and femininity with these characteristics.

In contrast, Jhally shows that men pictured are typically active, alert, and ready to respond; they face the onlooker with an expression similar to an animal stalking its prey. He offers an exception to this rule: gay pornography. He argues that both female and gay male models in pornography share subordinate characteristics, embodying cultural assumptions about male desire and gaze. The male-as-onlooker perspective is paramount and the perspective of the one being looked at is ignored. Jhally points out that this is "a relationship of subordination between watcher and watched."

The fifth segment, *Licensed Withdrawal*, describes two additional feminine codes of gender in Western media: dissociation and emotional vulnerability. Jhally states that men are presented as in control of the surround and their emotions, while women are often presented with their head down, eyes averted, suggesting that they are not paying attention to their environment or drifting from it in a dreamy fashion. He points out examples where women are wandering aimlessly, asleep, knocked out, and presented as "essentially dazed, zonked out zombies." He also shows examples where women are shown exhibiting anxious behaviors (e.g., biting their lip) and losing emotional control (e.g., laughing hysterically). These dissociative and emotionally vulnerable qualities, Jhally argues, make women appear un-oriented and vulnerable to attack as well as dependent on the protection and goodwill of men. He mentions research findings that assailants choose to victimize women who display postures that are characteristic of these feminine codes of gender. The key to safety, then, is acting opposite of the feminine codes of gender, which is difficult for women who have been repeatedly socialized to perform, and rewarded for performing, these codes.

In the sixth segment, *Infantilization*, Jhally explores how Western media portrays the link between girls and women as well as the link between boys and men. He argues that boys often have to prove themselves in a rite of passage in order to be considered a man; however, girls merely have to

“unfold” to become women. He shows that advertisers portray women as the same as girls (e.g., a mother and daughter wearing the same clothes and having similar hairstyles), as infantilized (e.g., women putting fingers in their mouth when nervous, hiding or peering behind objects, and giggling uncontrollably), and as expressionless dolls. Jhally acknowledges that these portrayals are often combined with ritualized positions of subordination, suggesting powerlessness (like that of a child) as well as sexual availability. He offers many prominent examples of infantilization whereby girls are positioned alongside text referring to them as “women” and women are positioned in a sexualized manner in advertisements that were created for girls.

In the seventh and eighth segments, *The Codes of Masculinity and Trapped in the Code*, Jhally asserts that Western media agents sometimes breach the traditional codes of masculinity and femininity but acknowledges that supports are in place to keep these codes structurally intact. He provides two examples. First, advertisers have become aware that there is a large market in men’s fashion. Male fashion models, then, need to become the object of the gaze, while still having heterosexual male consumers identify with them. Jhally points out that advertisers draw from the postures assumed by gay male fashion models to promote gaze while skillfully imposing the codes of masculinity by (a) including women in the advertisement to transform the homoerotic tableau to a more conventional heterosexual one and (b) presenting muscular male models with chiseled abs to resemble athletes that are strong and self-assured. Fashion advertising, then, has found a way to stay within the masculine code of gender while targeting a male audience. Second, female action heroines and athletes are presented as powerful, active, aggressive, and in control. Because these women have entered traditionally male domains, onlookers may not view them as “real women.” Thus, outside of their role, female action heroines succumb to the feminine gender code by wearing tight and revealing clothing and becoming seductive, submissive, and frivolous when they want men to do something for them. Outside of their sport, female athletes often appear in magazines as scantily clad or nude and assuming submissive, disempowered, and sexually provocative positions, such as lying down, kneeling, contorting their body, and biting their fingers. Jhally argues that female athletes are pressed to have onlookers view them as real women by engaging in ritualized displays of gender in the most visible—and heterosexual—manner possible.

The last segment (*History, Power, and Gender Display*) discusses the roots of the codes of gender. Jhally argues that advertisers do not create these images; instead, they draw from the same “corpus of displays” that already exist within the culture and concentrate these displays into images. In

doing so, advertisers privilege the codes of gender by giving them priority over other messages. These actions create new, more refined, meanings about gender—a term Goffman (1979, p. 84) referred to as *hyper-ritualization*. Thus, these images reflect the past, even as they create a new reality. Jhally points out that many advertisers draw their inspiration from nude women in European oil paintings and Alberto Vargas drawings from the 1920s to 1950s, which are far removed from the reality of women’s bodies. In this context, women are in a position to be observed by the men who either commissioned the paintings or are the intended spectators (Berger 1972). Other advertisers, such as Guess®, draw from the 1950s American West to place the setting for their images. Jhally informs viewers that one of the founders of Guess®, Paul Marciano, chose this context for his advertisements because it reflected a time when he felt women knew their place (i.e., to support men) and function (i.e., decorative). Jhally shows viewers that Marciano’s vision of femininity is represented in Guess® advertisements using the full repertoire of the “ritualization of subordination” behaviors as described in the fourth segment of this film. Jhally argues that Guess® images are not unique; they are a concentrated microcosm of the world of advertising and the culture as a whole.

Overall, *The Codes of Gender* is a very enlightening film that will (a) raise viewers’ consciousness about the omnipresent codes of gender that, while rooted in Western culture, are repeated in concentrated form throughout media, (b) encourage viewers to question the seeming normality of these codes, and (c) understand that these codes, while presented as normal, are insidious, especially for women. Jhally’s final point is that once we are aware of how strange these advertisements are and the codes of gender they represent, we have a choice to meekly accept the ideas behind them or to question them and point out to others how strange these codes of gender are—to make the invisible visible, so to speak. Educators should be warned that this film does contain nudity in a few of the advertisements, oil paintings, and drawings. This limitation aside, the film is likely to generate much discussion among students.

Conclusion

Cover Girl Culture and *The Codes of Gender* introduce many constructs and themes essential to discuss in gender and women’s studies courses (e.g., Women’s Studies, Psychology of Women, Psychology of Gender, and Sociology of Women). Showing these films at the very beginning of such a course would provide an excellent introduction to material that will be discussed in more detail throughout the course, generate students’ excitement and anticipation for

the material, spark discussion, show students how the course topics are interconnected, and provide a visual schematic framework they could use to gradually generate a more complex understanding of the class material. The girls who contextualize media messages and images in *Cover Girl Culture* also could be very powerful role models for girls in elementary and secondary schools. Watching these films would also help boys understand their role in perpetuating media messages in their interpersonal interactions with girls. Because of the importance of role models in shaping children's self-esteem and body image, it would be valuable for parents to watch these films with their daughters and sons, perhaps in community education programs and workshops targeted for media literacy and dismantling the physical features and body displays of gendered body ideals.

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