Integrating Social and Behavioral Theory into Public Health
LAB 5: Media effects and gender

The overall purpose of this lab is to think about how media influences have had an impact on your ability to carry out your individual behavior change. The lab also is intended to give you an opportunity to reflect on the variety of health messages contained (or missing) in media products.

Task 1: Preparation (Do this before you come to lab)
Prior to coming to lab, do the following:

1. Brainstorm some ways in which you think media influences gender roles. Think about what types of media you are exposed to on a daily basis, what messages these media express, how you are exposed to these media and how the types of media and their messages impact your conception of how a person of your gender should behave with regard to health. Write down some notes on this brainstorming (you will need this for the journal assignment).

2. Choose a 24-hour period this week to log or journal your media habits. Try to pick a 24-hour period that is a typical one for you. Record your time spent on-line, watching television, reading newspapers or magazines, listening to the radio, and so on. After logging your media habits, calculate what percent of your waking hours are spent in some way involved with media.

3. Select one print or web-based media example (such as a news story or an advertisement) that you feel in some way relates to your conception of how persons of your gender should relate to health. Bring this example to class.

Task 2: In the lab session
In your groups, break into pairs, and look at the media examples you brought in. Thinking in terms of gender role influence, analyze them using the following seven categories and associated questions:

1. “REALITY” CONSTRUCTION: Media construct our culture.

   Who produced this media? What kind of reality does this media example create? How accurate is this “reality”? What stories are NOT being told and why?

2. PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES: Media use identifiable production techniques. Advertisers, the public relations industry, and other powerful media makers spend time, energy, and money carefully creating media to influence the ways we think, behave, and buy. "Deconstructing" or analyzing production techniques – camera angles, lighting, editing, sound effects, colors, font styles, symbols, etc. - can build awareness, leading to more careful and "literate" consumption of media.

   What kinds of production techniques does this media example use?

3. VALUE MESSAGES: Media contain ideological and value messages. Some value messages are intended, while others are unintended. Messages can be positive or negative, and messages target specific groups.


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What kinds of value messages does this media example promote?

4. COMMERCIAL MOTIVES: Media are business and commercial interests. Most media are produced within the commercial industry – researching questions of ownership, production, and distribution is vital to fully understanding media’s influence.

What are the commercial motives behind this media example? Who or what paid for this media example and why? Do you know who or what owns this media product?

5. INDIVIDUAL MEANINGS: Individuals construct their own meanings from media. If parents, teachers, students and citizens are to learn about media, let’s honor, discuss and debate each other’s meanings.

What meanings do YOU find in reflecting about this media example? What differing meanings might other individuals or groups find?

6. EMOTIONAL TRANSFER: Media products create experiences that sometimes operate primarily at an emotional level and are usually designed to transfer the emotion from one symbol or lifestyle onto another (usually a product or behavior).

What emotions does this media example tap? If we step back from a purely emotional response, what might we consider if we think more deeply about this media example?

7. SYMBOLIC RHETORIC/Techniques of Persuasion: Symbols, flattery, repetition, fear, humor, powerful words and sexual images are especially common and effective techniques of media persuasion.

What persuasive techniques is this media example using?

Task 3: Individual journal entry

Answer the following in about 1.5 to 2 pages, using a narrative format. Assume that your goal is to persuade someone that being more media literate is worthwhile for themselves or for their community as part of a campaign to reduce the influence of media on gender-related behavior. Include answers to one or more of the questions below in your narrative:

1. Did having to be aware of your media habits during your 24-hour log period in any way affect them?
2. Do you view media any differently as a result of having analyzed one example in the lab? How so?
3. Look at the notes you made while brainstorming on ways in which you think media do or do not influence your health habits. Did doing this exercise in any way change your views of the relationship between media and your particular health behavior? Give a brief summary of your thoughts before lab, and any changes in your views after doing the lab exercise.