

MEDIA ANALYSIS ASSIGNMENT

This assignment asks you to become a cultural critic by applying some of the concepts of cultural analysis to contemporary mass media. Your sampling of mass media will be two-fold: (1) a slice of prime time commercial television, not special news coverage and (2) an image from print media such as a magazine. (1) Select at least a half hour of television to analyze carefully. Take notes while watching with the prompts below in mind. (2) In addition, select an advertisement in a recent issue of a magazine aimed specifically at teen age girls or women. In each instance, your analysis will focus on the representations of women in these cultural artifacts.

I. TV Analysis (2 -3 pages)

Your analysis will emerge out of your reflections about and responses to the prompts below. You may simply submit your work as a series of numbered responses to the prompts. While this assignment does not require you to write a formal essay, your responses should be carefully and thoughtfully written. Remember to incorporate specific examples from the TV program you watched to illustrate your analysis.

- 1) Who is the probable intended audience(s) for the television show you are analyzing? What factors contribute to your awareness of audience? Consider not only gender but also age, race/ethnicity, geographic location, etc.
- 2) Is there a relationship between the plot/action/narrative of the television show and the commercials that accompany it? To the target audience(s)? Explain.
- 1) Do the women who appear differ from one another, and if so, how? What is the relative frequency of women by age? By race/ethnicity? Are women (or anyone else) represented who are differently abled? According to dominant cultural ideals of beauty, how many women portrayed fall into the categories of 'beautiful,' 'average,' or 'unattractive'? What range of weight is represented between the women and the men and among the women themselves?
- 2) In what roles do women appear (or not appear)? Do they play multiple roles (e.g. wife, mother, lover, worker?) What types of jobs do they hold? How much time do they appear to devote to their different roles? What kinds of work do they do? Can you see any difference in the roles assigned to women or to men?
- 3) What level of education do the men and women seem to hold? Do you find women represented who appear to be of working-class backgrounds or to be poor? Are they major or minor characters? Are they portrayed sympathetically or used in ways that perpetuate stereotypes about race or class?
- 4) What is the relationship of women in the show to the products being advertised in commercials? Does it vary from program to program, from channel to channel? Is there any evidence of a famous assertion that in public representations of gender, men do the looking and women are there to be looked at? What influence, if any, can you see in the three decades plus of feminism's attempts to influence the representation of women in the media?

II. Print Ad Analysis

- 5) Who is the probable intended audience(s) for the magazine ad you are analyzing? Explain your answer. What is the print ad trying to sell? How does it make its appeal to the potential consumer? Does it appear to have any particular relationship to the articles accompanying it in the magazine? In your analysis of the print ad, focus on how women's bodies are positioned in the ad, whom they are looking at, whom is looking at them, what they are wearing, etc. In what ways does the ad emphasize or construct women's sexuality? How does it (or does it?) construct women's abilities to be their own subjects rather than objects to be looked at?