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The Real Miss America Campaign

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Media Campaigns
The **REAL Miss America**

**LET BEAUTY RING**

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*Assigned in COM 512: Intercultural Media Literacy (Dr. Roslyn Satchel)*

### Overview of Project

Media is the center of our social domain. Today, many reality television shows influence and alter one’s opinions, ideas, and overall outlook on life. Specifically, beauty pageants are a pervasive aspect of public entertainment within the American media landscape. These “beauty” contests have detrimental effects on American popular culture. Pageants provide a glimpse into American standards of femininity. Ironically, these objectifying beauty contests began in the same era when women gained the rights to vote. Beauty pageants seemed to contradict the new, strong, and independent image of the 1920’s female. From then to now, the messages that these pageants and other similar television programs present to the public are misleading, and ultimately have a negative impact on the audience, especially young women. Through subtle, yet harmful messages, young women engage in submissive behaviors, and attempt to fit into unrealistic societal beauty standards. Through a 3-step process, our project aims to shape the behaviors of young women by exposing the false realities portrayed on television and comparing them to truer and more meaningful representations. The first step of our media literacy project educates young women to challenge and critically engage the false messages about beauty portrayed on television. The second step represents women in a more authentic light, through creating a YouTube channel. Lastly, we address the idea of media literacy itself, teaching young women to think critically while watching television.

This project serves as an opportunity to alter how young women receive deceptive television. Today, the media landscape flood television shows that depict misleading ideas about what it means to be a beautiful. Television shows, like NBC’s “Miss America,” glorifies appearance and attributes over character. Additionally, shows that only judge young women based off appearance objectify women. The official Miss America website states that “Miss America ...is a real combination of beauty, grace, and intelligence, artistic and refined. She is a type which the American Girl might well emulate” (Miss American History). This problematic representation of women emphasizes the false perception that true beauty is the idealized “American Girl” seen in the pageant. In order to fit into the societal standards of beauty, young women mirror the models portrayed in Miss America. Likewise, shows like TLC’s “Honey Boo Boo” and “Toddlers and Tiaras” encourage young children to mirror this idealistic image of beauty. Through social construction, the overwhelming effects of media influence these children’s personal perception of self at such a young age. These television programs symbolize of a larger deception that young women experience daily.

To combat the hegemonic media representation of false beauty standards, our media literacy project aims to represent women in a more authentic light, focusing on their natural physique, God-given talents, and unedited successes and failures in life. Through creating a YouTube channel, called The **Real Miss America**, we hope to challenge the distorted realities of beauty. Our YouTube channel follows the same structure of pageants through interviews, catwalk and talents sections, but instead of being judged on physical attributes, young women redefine the stereotypical idea of beauty and value. In addition, our project addresses the idea of media literacy itself, so that it is not only providing a positive media outlet for women, but a way to critically assess the rest of the world’s media; teaching young women to think critically while watching television could help counter the hegemonic and false representation of beauty seen therein.

### Target Audience

The **Real Miss America** campaign targets women ages 13 to 21 as the primary audience. We chose to focus on this specific demographic because we believe preteens, teenagers, and adolescents, are most influenced by media.
starting in the early teens. Young women in these age groups have not developed the ability to think critically when exposed to images of women in the media such as television, movies, magazines, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Social media outlets highlight distorted and edited body images including a woman’s curves, breast, waist, and butt. In effect, these images penetrate the growing minds of girls ages 13 to 21, drastically changing their perception of self and beauty.

When a girl starts puberty, the importance of a role model is crucial to the development of their self-image. On average, girls start puberty between the ages of 8 to 14 (Braunstein, 2012). During this time period girls begin to notice an increase in height and weight, development of hips, growth of breast, and eventually start their menstrual cycle. During this time period girls feel self-conscious, sensitive, and begin comparing themselves to others. In the young preteen years, girls idolized women they see in the media and often times look up to them as role models for nothing more than being pretty. In Shelley Emling’s article, Where Have All The Role Models for Girls Gone, she states that when asking young girls about their roles models, “They usually include someone like Kim Kardashian, who is simply famous for being famous—once upon a time – scientist used to be celebrities as well.” Unfortunately, many of these young girls are unaware that idolized images of celebrities are often times photoshopped, distorted, and edited. This distortion becomes normalized in girl’s perception of what a role model should be. Therefore, the girl will never achieve this image. This ever-changing image is created as a result of society’s standard of beauty. Unfortunately, the lack in mental awareness, the demographic of young girls ages 13 to 21 would be most benefited by our campaign.

Media influences that are widespread on public television, magazines, billboards, and social media often have unrelenting effects on a girl’s mind. Between the ages of 13 to 21, girls do not always have a choice in the media being viewed in a household. Often times the media watched are subjective to the choices of parents, siblings and friends. When the media presents unreachable ideals of beauty, women absorb such ideals and do whatever it feels necessary to follow the ideals. The lack of choice during a time of minimal mental awareness to the underlying messages in images portrayed in media outlets can be detrimental. At a time when girls are defining themselves, media presents an ideal self that affects girls feeling of self-worth. On the other hand, women in the mid-twenties have a greater understanding of hegemony. Older women are aware of the hegemonic forces taking place in the media and less influenced by the images displayed in media. Therefore, we believe focusing on a younger demographic will be most beneficial because these young girls are our youth. If young girls can grow up with a greater sense of self-worth and empowerment, they will have greater opportunities in life to defy norms and become scholars, doctors, scientist, and more. The sky’s the limit when you are exposed to knowledge that changed the way you view the world. The Real Miss America campaign aims to change the challenge the norms put in place through hegemony and empower women to be the best Miss America they can be.

The Real Miss America campaign plans to implement primarily on the Internet. Within the Internet, the campaign will be promoting on YouTube and various social media outlets including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Further down the road, the goal is to reach out to television networks to propose the campaign idea to play during commercial breaks. Ideally, the television networks general audience is women ages 13-21, allowing the campaign to reach a wide variety of growing minds.

Literature Review

The History of Women

Arguably, women’s roles changed over the past 200 years at such extremes that it is not comparable for any other marginalized group. For centuries, women lacked political voice due to the denial of voting rights that male citizens acquired by simply being born. This disempowerment forced women to focus on nothing more than traditional societal roles such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the kids. To create change, women’s rights activist and reformers fought for equality for over 70 years. Through perseverance, determination, and numerous rejected requests, the day finally came that changed the role of women forever. On August 18, 1920, an amendment to the United States Constitution granted women the right to vote (Podolefsky, 1998). Victorious and liberated, stereotypical roles began to shift as more women slowly started to joined the workforce in the early twentieth century as well. Along with their emergence into the working world, the standard of beauty began to transform as well. Images found throughout different forms of media highlighted these socially constructed beauty ideals.

Women’s Roles

Women’s roles changed over the course of time and in turn, paved the way for the pursuit life, liberty, equality and happiness. Before the 1920’s women had little identity in society aside from stereotypical roles. In these roles, women were the caregivers, “If married, they stayed at home to look after the children while their
husband worked and brought in a weekly wage. If single, they did work which usually involved some form of service such as working as a waitress and cooking” (Trueman, 2015). This is the way a “normal” society functioned. Women had little to no choices, and men ruled all aspects of home and society. After the 1920’s, though job opportunities for women opened up, there was still a limitation on employment. “Most of the women who did have jobs were in working in factories or other low paying jobs. They also had to get a full education just to be equal with a man who only graduated from elementary school. Women could do the same job as a man and work just as hard but would still only get about half as much of a pay as a male” (Missiurta, 2012).

Women were not treated fairly in the workplace. The inequality women faced stemmed from the belief that, “women were taking away good paying jobs for the men that were trying to support their families” (Ware, 2009). Even if the women did they job better than males at work, they still made half as much pay. Though some women worked simply because they wanted to, others such a widows or single women had to work to survive. This unequal treatment stemmed the beginning of feminist movements for equality and the right to vote.

During World War II women’s emergence into the workforce became prominent. Many job opportunities for women opened up due to the enrollment of men into the U.S. Army. More particularly, “the diminishing resources in the United states and overseas caused a push for American females to join the workforce and help win the arms race against other countries while the men fought on the front lines” (Trueman, 2015). Men who left their farms and businesses for war often left their wives in control of the property. Also, with men being wounded in war, nursing became a profession for women (Marcellus, 2005). Though men could be nurses, women, based off of the assumption that they were more nurturing than men, dominated this occupation. At this point, women began to take a stand against inequality and civil rights activist began to emerge.

Women’s Rights Movement
The women’s rights movement began over 100 years before women won the right to vote. “Beginning in the 1820's and 1830's, an enormous upsurge of popular political energies took place—among working men, in the anti-slavery societies, and in almost every other aspect of antebellum life.” (Feminism and Suffrage, 1999). Women believed that their voices and opinions should be heard on all matters because they were citizens of the United States and it is a right given to them by the Declaration of Independence.

The women’s rights movement officially began in Seneca Falls, New York, when “68 women and 32 men signed a Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions. Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions described 18 areas of life where women's rights were denied and demanded an end to women's inferior status” (Ruthsdo, 1998). From this point on, the right to vote became a mission in the forefront of this movement, and women’s rights leaders carried out numerous campaigns to reach this goal. Upon achieving the right to vote in 1920, activism slowed until about 1960 where women’s rights leaders confronted the inequalities women faced in the workplace and political representation (Ruthsdo, 1998). Because of these pushes for change, women today are now offered the same rights as men in the U.S. Constitution.

Women’s Representation in the Media
Through the rise in mass media over the 20th century, the popular images of women began to change to bodies slimmer than the average American women (Brand, 1988). In affect, body image and beauty standards began to affect women of all ages. In the Skowron 2010 body image study, women from the ages of 45-64 admitted that body image is the main reason they exercise, followed by health. But where is it that women get this idea of body image? Throughout a woman’s life, she has had beauty standards thrown at her from a very young age starting from something as simple as a doll. “Barbie’s particular physical appearance—her sexualized body, her tight jeans (for Doctor Barbie) or than minidress (for Dentist Barbie)—may have something to do with the dampening of little girls’ career aspirations” (Cooper, 2015). Media representations, such as beauty contests, are problematic because if beauty is only defined as thin with blonde hair and blue eyes, this leaves out the majority of women.

History of Beauty Contests and the Miss America Pageants
Beauty contests serve as an integral part of American history. From 19th century May Day beauty competitions to 20th century “better baby contests,” numerous pageants existed then and remain today (A. Latham, 1995, p.150; A. Stern, 2002, p.68). They illustrate a distinct shift from “concern with the inward personality” to “heightened focus on appearance” in American society (Stern, 2002, p.77). Latham (1995) defines the term beauty contest as an event which “bases the selection of winners” on the verdicts of judges who operate under “formal rules” and the basis of “informal traditions and standards” (p.150). P.T. Barnum commenced the first beauty contest in 1854, involving just a few participants and “lavish prizes” (Latham, 1995, p.150). Additional competitions happened at that time too, in settings such as “museums, carnivals, and fairs” (Latham, 1995, p.150). Over time
these contests attained the public’s admiration, which influenced the rise of the most significant beauty contest of all, the Miss America pageant. This media literacy paper’s goal is to teach young women to challenge and critically engage the false messages about beauty portrayed on beauty contests like the Miss America pageant and other media forms. To do this, one must understand the history and upbring of the Miss America Pageant.

The Miss America Pageant

The first ever Miss America pageant in 1921 presented the concept of female idealism to America. With the program’s theme song stating, “There she is...Miss America...there she is...our ideal”, viewers were introduced to society’s new definition of female perfectionism: beauty (Pang, 2004, Page 687). After its initial introduction, the contest grew tremendously in popularity, becoming an “important civic ritual” and “vital source of knowledge” for people (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006, p.257). Audiences followed the program and compared themselves to participants, as any ordinary citizen could partake. In addition, competition champions intrigued spectators. Winning the Miss America crown meant “commercial success” and attaining “the American Dream” (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006, p.258). Ultimately, this notion manipulated women to see beauty as the only quality needed to achieve success (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006, p.258). This concept is still glorified in today’s contemporary practices. Although the Miss America pageant underwent several changes over time, throughout the 94 years of its existence, it remains culturally significant.

The 1920s

The 1920s represented a remarkable stage of accomplishment for women. The women’s suffrage amendment and the large acceptance of female participation in the workforce are two examples of this prosperity. In 1919, US Congress passed the 19th Amendment, which guaranteed all women the right to vote. Congress later ratified it in 1920. In the same year, the American workforce flourished and encompassed eight million women (The New Woman, 2014, p.1). Women made steps toward gaining more prominence in a male dominated society. These triumphs helped make it possible for women’s voices to be heard. The 1921 production of the Miss America pageant swayed many women’s focus to make “the pursuit of beauty [their] primary goal”, imposing a distraction from political, economic and social ambitions (Bivans, 1991, p.10). Faludi (1992) calls this one of the “great paradoxes of American women’s history” (p.50). At an instance when women finally began to make momentous strides in the political, economic and social agenda, the American culture began telling them their appearance mattered more. Other occasions in society followed that also encouraged this thought.

Consumerism, for instance, increased dramatically in the 1920s. A transformation in the consumer industry occurred, pressuring individuals to “recreate themselves through consumption” (Cleave, 2009, p.5). This meant fashion pieces, beauty accessories, and a person’s overall look became an essential component to the composition and expression of one’s identity (Cleave, 2009, p.5). Over time, women’s exterior became “representational and necessary” to continue their “political, economic, and social progress” (Cleave, 2009, p.6). This brought about the introduction of the “new woman”, exemplified through the universal flapper dress (Dumenil, 2007, p.22). This “new woman” illustrated a strong, attractive, liberated and independent female in the 1920s, emphasizing beauty as one of the most important traits.

A National Beauty Contest

Atlantic City, New Jersey marked the setting for the first Miss America pageant (Modesti, 2011, p.228). It served solely as a “bathing beauty contest” and participants were seen as “the body of a state, with the country in their eyes” (Modesti, 2011, p.228). From the start, the competition objectified the female by portraying her exclusively as a portrait of her home state. The Miss America pageant developed from a group of hotel owners who sought to lengthen summer resort season beyond Labor Day (Watson & Martin, 2004, p.106). Originally titled A National Beauty Contest, it featured eight contestants and took place within a weeklong festival, sponsored by national newspapers (Watson & Martin, 2004, p.107). The contest consisted of two parts: the Inter City Beauty competition and the Most Beautiful Bathing Girl in America (Miss America, p.1). The Inter City Beauty set judged women on appearance, personality, conversation with judges and interaction with the crowd (Miss America, p.1). The Most Beautiful Bathing Girl in America portion evaluated females on their presence and poise in a swimsuit (Miss America, p.1). Margaret Gorman, Miss Washington, D.C., swept both categories (Miss America, p.1). According to the Miss America website, the New York Times said Gorman “represented the type of womanhood America needed.” Specifically, she was “appealing in appearance” and “able to shoulder the responsibilities of home-making and motherhood” (Miss America, p.1). In this instance, Miss America expresses a broader image of the female ideal, which encompasses beauty and demonstrates an exemplary role in the home.
The Miss America Pageant Through the Years

Following the first Miss America pageant, effects of the Great Depression led the competition directors to discontinue it in the late 1920s (Watson & Martin, 2004, p.108). After it returned in 1935, directors added a talent portion (Watson & Martin, 2004, p.108). This tradition still continues in today’s contemporary pageants. Over the next ten years, multiple changes were made to the Miss America program, including transitioning to a new title, Miss America, and confirming Convention Hall in Atlantic City as the home of the contest (Watson & Martin, 2004, p.109). During World War II, the pageant exhibited a “positive moment in an otherwise sad time” and began “persuading college women” to enter the contest (Watson & Martin, 2004, p.109). This led to the incorporation of a Miss America scholarship program to entice prospective contestants. In 1948, the organization sought to transform the image of Miss America by crowning the winner in an evening dress rather than a swimsuit, which eventually caused uproar amongst audiences and the press (Watson & Martin, 2004, p.110). This backlash resulted because at the time, the sole foundation of Miss America relied on a woman’s physical appearance. When viewers watched the pageant, they judged women based only on their bodies. If a contestant wore a ball gown instead of a swimsuit, the audience saw less of the body, which meant fewer opportunities to objectify her. This criticism did not cause much harm, however, because when ABC televised the pageant for the first time in 1954, it reached an audience of 27,000,000 people (Watson & Martin, 2004, p.110).

America began experiencing radical cultural change in the years to come, which led the Miss America pageant to encounter many protests (Watson & Martin, 2004, p.110). With the eruption of “antiwar protesters, hippies, sexual revolution [advocates], and women’s and civil rights [campaigners],” Miss America found conflict because some of these groups strongly disagreed with the contest’s standards (Watson & Martin, 2004, p.110). At this point, the program grappled to survive. The most noteworthy demonstration took action in 1968. Feminists accused the Miss America organization of promoting the female ideal as “plastic, doll-like, submissive sex objects who paraded in swimsuits for the pleasure of men” (Dow, 2003, p.128). They also insisted “conformity was the key to the [Miss America] crown” (Dow, 2003, p.132). As a result, the association took great measures to compromise with audiences. They decreased prominence of the swimsuit portion in the pageant, banned hair stylists and makeup artists, stopped announcing contestants’ breast, waist, and hip measurements, and started requiring contestants to choose a social issue to support (Dow, 2003, p.135). Although these motives did not eliminate negative opinions about the Miss America pageant, they revealed the organization’s desire to achieve a positive image in the public. Still, this pageant marginalized women by solely focusing on outward appearance and fitting a specific beauty standard. Today, media continues to perpetuate this idea through television shows.

Women in Media

Before addressing the problems with representation of women in media, it is important to understand that women’s issues in general are extremely neglected in mass media. According to Lind’s article, Framing Feminism, when analyzing 135,759,087 words, the main words “women” and “woman” appeared only 0.85% of all words in mass media (Lind, 2013a, p. 141). In the 1970’s, rapid change occurred for women in media (Papper, 2010). In television, proportion of women’s representation significantly increased, from 24% to 41%, just within the past 40 years (Kharroub & Weaver, 2014). Since then, change became a more stagnant and complex issue (Papper, 2010). Although the presence of women is more salient, Papper’s research suggests that women are still portrayed in stereotypical roles that maternalize, infantilize, and sexualize their characters (Papper, 2010). These unrealistic portrayals of women in media are detrimental messages that perpetuate the hegemonic idea that men are dominant in society.

Maternalization

Research suggests that after the 1950’s, although fewer women worked in traditional professions, men still dominated the workforce (Papper, 2010). Married women in television appear in traditional roles such as non-professionals or homemakers who take care of their children (Kharroub & Weaver, 2014). In reality, there is a rise in women who are “set free from their ‘feudal chains’” and are embracing the “cool, creative, and egalitarian “working society (Banks & Milestone, 2011, p. 73).

The popular television show Television and Postfeminist Housekeeping: No Time For Mother reinforces the idea that women who are independent or have jobs outside of homemaking are unable to have a normal family life. There are underlying tensions between a woman's personal life (home) and professional responsibilities (work) (Woronzoff, 2014). Women are expected to balance both lives perfectly. In shows such as Parenthood or The Good Wife, working mothers are seen as “super-moms,” spending hours preparing nutritious meals for their children, attending soccer games, and keeping the house spotless (Lind, 2013, p. 235). The issue with this idealized media
content is that it perpetuates messages that suggest if all moms were advanced at juggling the craziness of life and work, then everything would be perfect.

Furthermore, women who are not dependent on men for support are career-driven and more likely to have difficulty in balancing their professional and personal life (Perryman & Theiss, 2014). In the movie To Die For, Suzanne’s husband chastises her, for not “placing more importance on his job than hers” (Perryman & Theiss, 2014, p.353). Her ambition in her career is negatively affecting the relationship with her husband. In the same film, friends of Sylvia, constantly ridicule her for being an independent, single woman in her 30’s with no man. The female characters, in both of these scenes, are workaholics with relationship problems, which further highlights the career challenges experienced by women.

Furthermore, media portrays mothers as, “weak, silly, stupid, or deranged” (Lind, 2013, p. 231). In shows such as Malcolm in the Middle, Desperate Housewives, and South Park, the central plot revolves around bad mothering rather than bad fathering. Likewise, reality TV shows such as Super Nanny, Kate Plus 8, and Supper Nanny are all about the idea of helping the failing mother, who cannot control her own children. They are “blamed as individuals, rather than blame being placed on social structures and governmental priorities” (Cuklanz, 2006, p. 48). Shows like these are popular among audiences because bad mothering sells in the media.

Infantilization

In Lind’s article, Framing Feminism, she highlights how television infantilized and represented women in a victimization frame that refers to keywords such as “weakness, vulnerability, mental illness, crime, fear, and dysfunctionality” (Lind, 2013a, p. 143). This framework created by the perpetrator reinforces the idea that women are incapable, child-like beings who are constantly dependent on men. Another interesting study shows that women are the most represented in comedic movies while being underrepresented in genres such as action and drama, which suggests that women cannot be taken as seriously as men (Kharroub, & Weaver, 2014). To further demonstrate this issue, the historical “weather girl” (Perryman & Theiss, 2014, p.350) stereotype continues to flood the media. This stereotype emphasizes the idea of beauty over brains. Research implies that the female broadcaster is less intelligent, and therefore, more dependent on men because of her lack of ability to accurately predict the weather. This idea highlights a women’s alleged lack of credibility of a woman compared to that of a man.

Another example from King of the Hill shows a female broadcaster, Nancy, who is portrayed as submissive, unintelligent, and needing the assistance of a man. The director in this scene tells Nancy, “Don’t worry about how any of this stuff works. That’s what Irv’s here for.” Nancy responds, “I’m just glad I have someone to do my science for me” (Perryman & Theiss, 2014, p.351). Not only does this scene portray Nancy as incapable of understanding science, it also portrays her character as the “typical weather girl airhead” when she later asks, “Are the puffy clouds good or bad?”(Perryman & Theiss, 2014, p.352). Nancy’s lack of basic knowledge on meteorological forecast is not only unrealistic and exaggerated, but also widely accepted by viewers at home. In addition, women play roles that embody certain traits such as being emotional, weak, and often younger than men. Interestingly, this age factor implies that a value of a woman lies in her youthfulness (Kharroub & Weaver, 2014).

Similarly, female characters in the television programs typically embody female stereotypes such as “being rescued, submissive, dependent, weak, and passive” (Kharroub, & Weaver, 2014, P.182). The recurring scenes of the infantilization of women in media continue to highlight the idea male superiority.

Sexualization

In addition to the gender role portrayals on television in the United States, the representations of women in television worldwide vary by genre, yet are still restricted to certain stereotypical characteristics. In a study conducted through the analysis of 45 Arab music videos, the majority of video content video fell into two different groups. The first group consists of women who were sexually exploited and in seductive poses, while the other group consists of the traditional image of women who “longed for a lover” (Kharroub & Weaver, 2014, P.18). Similarly, the stereotypical weather girl who embraces the idea of beauty over brains, this movement also heavily focuses on appearance, sex appeal, and fashion.

The objectification of women in television has been a long-standing issue (Ullah, 2014). Television glamorizes women, especially their bodies, as a selling strategy to attract the audience. Rather than simply selling products, these television commercials are selling sex by portraying women as objects of desire, instead of as real humans with balanced emotions (Ullah, 2014). In the film, Weather Woman, the broadcaster Suzanne is wearing a short skirt while delivering the weather forecast in “low, breathy voice” (Perryman & Theiss, p.353) to attract her audience. The children’s movie, Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs, prioritizes the importance of beauty and appearance over intelligence. The female broadcaster, Sam Sparks, drastically alters her appearance in order to “fit in” in the world of broadcast meteorology. She “dyed her hair, got contacts, and wore more revealing clothing”
disorders media’s Eating portrayed slim. From a young age, television exposes children to these unrealistic standards of beauty. In the television show *Sports Night*, the character Sally, who is a minor character, only appears in the show as a sex object. The show remains ambiguous about whether Sally is competent in her job, but only highlights the fact that she flaunts her “short skirts or low-cut blouse” (Painter & Ferrucci, 2012, p.247). and sleeps with men she barely knows. Sally’s character has an erotic edge, which attracts the audience and epitomizes the idea that sex, sells.

Socialization
When the media is constantly feeding its audience socialized messages about women’s gender, identity, profession, intellectual ability, or just women in general, this contrived socialization will play an influential role in an individual’s self-image (Painter & Ferrucci, 2012). Media view women as “passive, overemotional, and dependent on men” (Painter & Ferrucci, 2012, P. 249). Research implies that these stereotypes have an overwhelmingly powerful influence on young girls today. These messages are crucial because they construct the viewers’ ideas about gender roles, beliefs, and attitudes in society. Similarly, television shows affect the way young women view their body image.

Body Image
Body image is defined as how individuals view themselves during the continual process of physical change (Markey, 2010). Individuals tend to associate his or her self-image and self-concept in terms of their physical bodies. In other words, appearance seems to be everything. Body image is also described as a person’s conscious recognition of the size and shape of his or her own body (Te’eni-Harari, Eyel, 2015). The way people perceive their bodies is largely formed during childhood by major influential powers such as parental figures, peers and social environments. In more recent years, information coming from images promoted by media has become extremely more influential in the way a person perceives his or her self (Kazimierczak, Patryn, Niedzieski, 2013). The media’s emphasis on a slim figure and the successes that comes with it, such as professional and personal achievements, makes people reconsider and obsess over their own bodies. This is particularly the case for females. The overwhelming pressures to be acceptable in society cause women to develop psychological, emotional and physical illness such as, bulimia, anorexia, and obesity (Markey, 2010).

The Distorted Mirror Effect
Media’s overwhelming power and presence has transformed the idea of body image. In the 1900’s, a curvy and voluptuous body figure was considered a societal norm for women. Nowadays, that norm has changed to a more petite and leaner build (Lawrie, Sullivan, Davies, 2006). The definition of a beautiful body has been completely redefined into unrealistic and thinner versions of a normal female body. As thinness continues to be an emphasis in our society, it seems inevitable that women will start to acknowledge and integrate thinness into their lives and belief systems (Masako, Preston, 2015).

Many women strive to mirror models portrayed on television, often pressuring themselves to fit into unhealthy standards set forth by the media. “The average model portrayed on television is approximately 5’11” and 120 pounds. By contrast, the average American woman is 5’4” and 140 pounds” (Holmstrom, 2004, P.197). Women look at these models and may become dissatisfied with their own bodies. Pinhas and colleagues (1998) discovered that viewing images of female fashion models had an immediate negative effect on women’s moods, and they become increasingly less satisfied with their physical appearances. In order to feel beautiful, women believe they have to change something about their body image. The study by Kazmierczak and colleagues (2013) supports the notion that the media causes a distorted mirror effect, which cause women to view themselves in a negative and anxious way. The study showed that about 88% of respondents felt fat, while in reality, others perceived them as slim. This supports how the distorted mirror effect is largely due to the viewing of unrealistic images of women portrayed through the media.

Eating Disorders
Cultural values of the ideal physique negatively influence people’s values and behaviors, resulting in the intense maintenance of body image and eating habits. According to Hausenblas and colleagues (2013), the mass media’s portrayal of ideal physical beauty is the main catalyst behind the increasing rate of prevalence of eating disorders in Western society. Hausenblas conducted a study examining media’s portrayal of the ideal physique on
people’s eating disorder symptoms. The results suggest that viewing ideal images in the media increased depression and anger, and decreased self-esteem – all of which are symptoms associated with eating disorders.

This social comparison of body image causes women to harshly critique one another’s body figure. Women tend to judge each another in order to feel better about themselves. This confidence boost allows women to have a less negative view of their own body images. Social comparison, which is influenced by the power of the media, pressures women to make unhealthy and life-threatening habits because they are dissatisfied with the way that they look in the mirror. Holmstrom (2004) suggests that every individual possesses an unrealistic and perfect image of himself or herself, which often differs from their physical being. When people compare themselves to images of thinness certain irrational emotions can arise about oneself and cause depression and fatal eating disorders. After viewing images of female fashion models, a woman may describe themselves in dissatisfying ways based off of appearance (Pinahs, Toner, Ali, Garfinkel, Stuckless, 1999). Women feel angrier and have greater depressing moods after looking at pictures of thin and beautiful women (Pinah et al., 1999).

These negative emotions may lead women to participate in unhealthy eating and exercise habits in order to look like the gorgeous women portrayed on television, in magazines, and on the Internet. In this attempt, women might partake in bulimic tendencies in order to lose an unrealistic amount of weight (Markey, 2010). The results can be physically and emotionally detrimental.

Women may also turn to anorexic tendencies to combat dissatisfaction with their bodies. Anorexia causes people to not only perceive, but actually see, their body as being plumper. Anorexics will be harsher critics concerning their own size and shape. Also, they are way more critical of other women’s figures (Seeger, Braus, Ruf, Goldberger, & Schmidt, 2002). According to Kazmierczak et al. (2013), women stricken with the disorder feel very uncertain about themselves and do not agree with the natural changes of their bodies, and therefore, decide to slim down to keep a more childish figure. They do not accept the shape of their bodies, and try to achieve an ideally slim physique that is unachievable. This need to achieve a slim body is directly related to the body image norms of our society that are perpetuated through media platforms.

A study by Kazmierczak and colleagues (2013) indicated that obesity is linked to distorted body image as well. Because of the perpetuation of thinness, people who are overweight may develop a lack of self-acceptance and increased shame. People may make fun and joke about a person’s weight. Furthermore, there is an increasing popularity of suggesting someone to losing weight (Kazmierczak et al., 2013). This may cause a person to desperately want to lose weight to fit in. This desperation may lead a person to deprive his or her self of a healthy diet, causing them to partake in binge eating practices. These practices only lead to eventual weight gain at a rapid pace, and cause even more increase dissatisfaction with one’s body.

It is not possible to overstate the power has media over women. Various forms of media play an extremely influential role in the process of constructing and deconstructing notions of beauty, identity, and most importantly, worth. Traditional ideas of physical perfection dominate today’s media landscape. Many of today’s most popular media outlets have dangerous messages about how women should look, act and think. The hegemony, or aggressive dominance of very particular American beauty standards, does not accurately reflect the diverse population of women in this country. Hegemonic ideas of beauty need to be challenged in unique and creative ways in order to free women from their oppressive stronghold. In reality television, media perpetuates these ideas by capturing the audience’s attention through deceptive portrayals of reality.

What the Media Tells Us

Reality shows are a popular form of media that attempt to hook their viewers into the show with feelings of intimacy. When we hear from a specific person on the show during a one on one interview or watch them go through a personal struggle we feel an attachment to them. This attachment to a particular character then serves as a passageway to transfer cultural messages which “circulate informal ‘guidelines for living’ that we are all (at times) called upon to learn from and follow. These are…practical techniques for reflecting on, managing and improving…our personal lives with the resources available to us” (Kramer, 2013). Reality television shows such as The Bachelor and The Swan try to paint pictures of perfect femininity and beauty. The Bachelor depicts a group of women, with very similar, skinny physiques, go through extreme measures to “win their man,” which oftentimes are not moral or admirable (Kramer, 2013). The Swan perpetuates standardized ideas of beauty and what it means to be a happy woman in a very different way. This reality television show features a woman’s transformation under massive amounts of cosmetic surgery and extreme weight loss. Personal interviews of the women show how miserable they are with their lives and with themselves because of how they look before the transformation. This emphasis on the link between physical perfection and happiness “emphasize the shamefulness of the non-ideal body, reinforcing the idea that only congenitally sexy (thin, white, attractive) people deserve to have sex, since the women
must be surgically transformed prior to intimacy” (Marwick, 2010). In the case of both shows, it is assumed that a woman cannot be happy unless she is skinny, beautiful, and with a man.

Aside from the basic ideals of hegemonic beauty such size and skin color, women are also fed the notion that to be beautiful one cannot have any disabilities. In a focus group conducted with women with disabilities, participants said that the cultural ideals of the female body as presented through the media are “young, perfect skin, wrinkle-free, tall, thin, glamorous, sexual, powerful, strong, confident” (Wolf, Krakow, Taft, 2012). The women in the group overwhelmingly thought that women they could relate to were not represented on television because there is a large lack of characters, especially women with disabilities (Wolf, Krakow, Taft 2012).

**Success Stories of Media Literacy Implementation**

Media literacy and media literacy education can occur successfully in unlimited ways. For example, reduction of shape and weight concern in adolescents has been achieved simply through implementing an eight lesson media literacy program in schools for eighth graders. “Media Smart,” the program which was delivered to these students, is intentionally very interactive and includes small group work for a self-esteem-enhancing effect (Wilksch and Wade, 2009). This link between interaction and success is prevalent in other media literacy studies as well. In terms of new media literacy (new media referring to the Internet, mobile telephony, and video games), there exists a framework in which people are active participants in the new digital environment. With this NML (new media literacy) framework, a person’s role is “reconfigured to account not only for media consumption, but for active media creation as well. A study on NML framework and media literacy found that, “the ability to creatively produce and distribute multimedia texts should correlate strongly with higher levels of media literacy” (Literat, 2014).

Yet another example of a successful media literacy campaign is the “Spotlight” production, which utilizes broadband to connect young girls from across the globe with each other for “face to face” conversations. This creative program “effects social change by giving research and media production training to young women, who in turn shape images and develop stories that speak to the values, strengths and beauty of girls and women of color” to combat the “millions of girls and women, unaware of the influence of media and cultural stereotypes on their own self images and perceptions of others unwittingly corroborate with social forces that perpetuate the disempowerment of women” (Simms, 2009). These short interactions serve to counterbalance the negative impact of the media of girls and encourage women on both sides of the conversation not to perpetuate her own devaluation, though we are socialized to do so through the media.

**Captivating Models of Media Literacy**

While there is an infinite number of ways to challenge ideas of hegemonic beauty, there are some examples that are extremely creative and thought provoking that align with the purposes of The Real Miss America campaign. Girls Write Now is a non-profit organization that pairs teen girls from schools in New York City with professional women in writing-related fields. This community of fourteen to eighty-year-old women come together as working writers with the purpose of sharing their work and growing as workers (Pouncey, 2008).

There is also the study of texts and such as Barbie for President, Legally Blonde 2: Red, White, & Blonde, and the American Girl Collection’s Julie Albright series books. Though play dolls for girls and Hollywood scripts are not often encouraging or counter cultural tools for females, feminist intervention has led to the creation of these types of spin off versions, which are then used to “create a media landscape that constructs an environment through which girls come to understand the role of women in electoral politics” (Zaslow and Schoenberg, 2012).

Possibly the most influential example of new media comes from @SoccerGrlProbs, a social media group that started with a simple YouTube video poking fun at the daily struggles of a girl dedicated to soccer. Since the video has gone viral, @SoccerGrlProbs has a series of videos on YouTube, a Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram page, as well as a line of apparel. The three women in charge of this seemingly accidental campaign enable “young female athletes to negotiate the conflicting demands of emphasized femininity and athleticism by inspiring self-constructions that allow them to claim athletic ‘somebodiness’ while simultaneously subverting discourses emphasizing self-mastery and female athletes’ (hetero) sexual attractiveness” (Heineken, 2015). Rather than try to fit into the pre-constructed ideals of beauty created by the media, @SoccerGrlProbs creates their own media, highlights their “counter cultural” masculine athleticism, and encourages women to embrace their rough, “unladylike” traits.

**Conclusion**

Given this literature, there is a gap between mainstream, reality television shows that authentic depictions of women in the media that The Real Miss America is seeking to fill. As Katherine Fry points out, “ultimately we
are all interested in helping people realize the higher human ideals of critical thought, deep understanding, fulfillment, justice, equality, and democracy” (Fry, 2015). With research that clearly explains how to successfully implement media literacy and creative designs for new media to follow, our YouTube channel has the resources to successfully and creatively engage women in a dialogue about authentic beauty that inspires confidence and counteract the disillusions hegemonic beauty.

**Campaign Implementation**

Our group will implement *The Real Miss America* campaign digitally. Since the American youth lives in a digital world, we hope to reach our younger target audience through digital channels. Primarily, we will utilize YouTube to showcase our project. When promoting, we will utilize YouTube, social media platforms, and television networks. Within these passages, our team will promote the slogan *Let Beauty Ring*. We strongly believe these tactics will endorse “The Real Miss America” in a positive manner to our target audience.

Our team will use our slogan *Let Beauty Ring* in all of our promotional efforts. We developed this campaign motto for several reasons. First, it incorporates American patriotism. By working off the famous expression *Let Freedom Ring*, we integrate historic and present nationalism into our movement. Society introduced this saying through the 1831 song *My Country ’Tis of Thee*. Now, American citizens continue to use the phrase when expressing patriotism and their individual liberties. For this reason, our audience should resonate with the phrase because of its obvious familiarity. Our second purpose for using *Let Beauty Ring* as a campaign catchphrase is because it includes the core concept of our campaign: beauty. Through our project, we hope to transform the current meaning of American beauty by encompassing portrayals of realistic, natural, inward and outward female qualities. When paired with *The Real Miss America*, we trust the *Let Beauty Ring* slogan will encompass this project goal and successfully foster it to our audience.

At the start of our campaign, we will primarily showcase *The Real Miss America* on a YouTube channel. We chose YouTube because our target audience frequently visits and interacts with the site. In order to produce plenty of content, our group will begin filming prior to the station launch. To maintain the expected success of *The Real Miss America*, we will upload new episodes once a week. In each segment, we plan on visiting public settings and approaching women of all ages to participate. Their participation includes casually answering questions on camera. We will urge participants to be honest, relaxed and natural. Essentially, we will incite women to be themselves. Questions will feature similar content to the material presented in Miss America pageants. We will query women about their favorite hobby, support them in telling us about their style, and ask them how they define beautiful. Through these and a series of additional questions, our team hopes to illustrate what real American beauty is instead of the idealistic and impossible beauty displayed in modern Miss America pageants.

We will also employ promotions for *The Real Miss America* through the YouTube system. Our team will create a shortened, inspiring clip of our first episode. To keep it short and simple, the 1-minute video will be a collage of different participants answering a variety of questions. We want to discourage America’s static, beauty template that tells women they must fit a specific mold to be beautiful and accepted. By revealing an assortment of qualities and characteristics in women of all different ages, races and ethnicities, this brief preview will show no exact definition of beauty truly exists. The promo sums up the overarching theme of *The Real Miss America*, which conveys that real beauty lies within every woman, regardless of how she physically looks.

Furthermore, our group will actively use social media to promote *The Real Miss America* series. Social media plays an extremely influential role in modern society. For this reason, we believe creating Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages for *The Real Miss America* will successfully spread awareness. The hashtag #TheRealMissAmerica will show on all posts across the three social media sources. This brands the show on all content posted in the future. We will also include other hashtags such as #RealBeauty and #BeYou. These sayings relate to our audience and further illuminate the central premise of *The Real Miss America*. Moreover, we will tag all posts with the location as the United States of America to accentuate the show’s goal: to change America ideals. One person on our team will act as a social media representative, monitoring and responding to every social media action. All of these elements will emphasize the core motives of *The Real Miss America* throughout social media networks.

Beginning a month prior to airing our first episode, we will launch the Facebook page. On this outlet, we aim to post once a day featuring a range of content about participants. We will report about them, using sayings such as “Get to know (insert name)” and “Find your beauty like (insert name) did”. We also want to boost interaction on our Facebook page to get to know our audience better. We will ask followers in posts to comment if they believe they are beautiful and why or why not. Another question might ask, “What makes someone beautiful?” By gaining an understanding of our audience, over time, we hope to convert their preliminary views on beauty and influence
their lives in a positive way. Our team will use Facebook as a main channel to better understand our audience and inform them about The Real Miss America production.

We plan to use Instagram as an information channel as well. Instagram posts will also begin a month prior to the launch of The Real Miss America to gain exposure early on. On the page, our team will post two times a day, covering a broad assortment of material. In the beginning, we will present photos explaining our journey, how we developed The Real Miss America concept and our excitement about the launch. By providing a background story, viewers will hopefully relate to us. Following the first episode, we will extend post content. Viewers will see backstage moments, show secrets, future episode previews, team bonding activities, fun participant photos, and other matters. Our team aims to portray a more in depth look at The Real Miss America production through Instagram.

Lastly, our group will use the popular social media network Twitter to promote the show. On Twitter, we will provide a welcoming atmosphere for followers to communicate with us. With posts stating, “Tweet us about your beauty”, “We want to know the REAL you” and “Be our next REAL Miss America”, posts inspire others to respond and interact. Likewise, we will also tweet about our film locations. This informs followers where we plan to film and allows them the chance of being featured on the show. We will also ask followers to use the hashtag #LetBeautyRing to help raise awareness for the show. Twitter will demonstrate an active forum for communication with our audience.

The final digital spectrum our team will use for publicity efforts is television. We desire to use television because it reaches our primary and secondary audiences. We also know former YouTube channels successfully used television as a form of advertising. We will pursue this motive by sending our preview clip to specific networks that feature shows with a strong female audience rating, such as ABC’s Scandal. We will send this information two months before The Real Miss America launch. We will also pitch the reason why it should be featured. Since the preview aligns with some of the attitudes expressed on these shows, such as female empowerment, we believe network directors will agree to use our clip for a commercial. Our group understands promoting The Real Miss America through this digital realm will be a challenge to achieve because of the American system society lives by. Television executives, more often than not, convey unrealistic principles of beauty. The difficulty will lie in persuading them to alter their existing pattern. We will, however, work toward this goal of obtaining television coverage for The Real Miss America.

Our team will also promote through television talk shows. Since these typically showcase Internet sensations, we see them as a prime opportunity to raise awareness about The Real Miss America. We also realize this task is more achievable than receiving commercial airtime in the early stages of our campaign. Our team will reach out to talk show hosts and producers from “The Ellen Show” and “The Tyra Show” prior to the launch of The Real Miss America. Should we grasp their attention, our team will decipher what is aired on the shows. Accessing these talk shows will bring substantial attention to The Real Miss America.

Through the above promotional tactics, our project team will successfully spread the word about The Real Miss America. By concentrating on the digital world in American society, we know our idea will reach a large audience early on. American beauty ideals limit women in all areas of life. Through our project, we hope to free women of these restrictions. By utilizing YouTube, social media platforms, and television networks with the inclusion of our slogan Let Beauty Ring, we hope to support The Real Miss America and fully transform the American definition of beauty.

Samples

The Real Miss America Slogan & Logo
The Real Miss America Preview Clip

Sarah, 20 - Malibu, CA
The Real Miss America

Nicole, 22 – Venice, CA
The Real Miss America
“The Real Miss America” YouTube Channel: www.youtube.com/TheRealMissAmerica

Facebook: www.facebook.com/TheRealMissAmerica

Instagram: www.instagram.com/TheReal.MissAmerica
Twitter: www.twitter.com/RealMissAmeric1

Competition

The Miss America Pageant

“Style, Service, Scholarship and Success”

Miss America is an annual scholarship competition open to women from the United States between the ages of 17 and 24 years old. The contest is sponsored by the non-profit organization, The Miss America Organization, which created the contest in order to provide opportunities for young women to promote their voices in culture, politics and the community. According to the organization, the contest’s purpose is to “provide young women with a vehicle to further their personal and professional goals, and instill a spirit of community service through a variety of unique nationwide community-based programs” (Miss America Organization, 2015). The pageant works as a public forum for today’s women to profess their viewpoints, demonstrate their talents, and describe their accomplishments to audiences both present at the competition, as well as during live telecast. The majority of the contestants have obtained, or are in the process of earning, college or postgraduate degrees, and plan to utilize Miss America’s scholarship grants to further their educations.

While, this competition promotes women’s growth and development in society, Miss America’s rules and regulations only allow a certain type of American woman to compete in the competitions. In order to make it to the Miss America competition, a contestant must first win a local competition and then compete to represent her state. Only women who have money, a lot time, and the support of family, friends and peers have the privilege of
competing for title of Miss America. Therefore, it is safe to say that the contest is not representative of the diversity of American women. The Real Miss America Youtube channel will not restrict any type of women from being a part of the YouTube series. Instead, the Real Miss America will actively seek to portray and promote women from a variety of cultures, socioeconomic status, and racial and ethnic identities.

The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty

“Imagine a World Where Beauty is a Source of Confidence, Not Anxiety”

Dove launched the Campaign for Real Beauty in 2004. The campaign started a global conversation about the need for a wider definition of beauty after a study proved that the definition of beauty was limiting and unattainable for the female population. Dove discovered that only 2% of women around the world describe themselves as beautiful. In order to combat this negative self-concept, Dove has employed various communication vehicles to challenge beauty stereotypes and invite women to join a discussion about beauty. Dove’s campaign is a direct competitor of the REAL Miss America Youtube channel and its #LetBeautyRing campaign because they target the same population, and seek to challenge the same social issues through similar principles and ideals. To compete with the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty, the Real Miss America YouTube channel and #LetBeautyRing campaign utilizes storytelling, videography and audience interactions to promote the message that diversity should define beauty in the United States. The Real Miss America’s YouTube channel and hashtag campaign will utilize interactive platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, set up for the female population to engage in discourse about how diversity and multiculturalism makes American women beautiful.

The Victoria’s Secret Show

The Victoria’s Secret Show
“Gain Your Wings”

Victoria’s Secret is one of the largest American retailers of women’s lingerie. The company sells lingerie, womenswear and beauty products through catalogs, the Internet and in U.S. stores. Beginning in 1995, Victoria’s Secret launched its Victoria’s Secret Fashion show, which broadcasts on primetime American television every year. The show is a high-profile event featuring the world’s most popular models displaying elaborately costumed lingerie as the walk down the runway.

Working with well-renowned models helped the brand gain notice and more features on television commercials. These models became known as The Victoria’s Secret Angels, which essentially makes them contracted spokesmodels for the brand. These Angels promote a specific image of beauty that consists of perfect skin, blemish-free complexions, and extremely fit and thin bodies. As the Angels walk down the runway, scantily dressed in hyper-sexualized lingerie sets, they project the message that being “hot” is synonymous with success and achievement. The Angels are paid thousands of dollars to flaunt their bodies - not their brains. The Real Miss America YouTube Channel and #LetBeautyRing campaign seeks to disassociate success and achievement with physical beauty that is portrayed by the Victoria’s Secret Angels.

**Partnerships**

**The Ellen Show**

The Ellen Show is an American television talk show hosted by the popular comedian Ellen DeGeneres. It is produced by Telepictures and airs on stations owned by NBCUniversal in the United States and Canada. The program features audience participation games where prizes are given out daily. The show’s combination of comedic relief, celebrity and musical guests, and human-interest stories gained it much popularity within American popular culture.

The Real Miss America YouTube Channel will ask Ellen to incorporate the #LetBeautyRing campaign into a segment of her show. Usually, The Ellen Show dedicates a section of airtime to promoting important social issues in the United States. Also, a segment of the show called “15 Minutes of Fame” often features non-celebrities such as intelligent children, small business owners or people who are passionate some sort of social issue. Since The Real Miss America YouTube Channel wants to catch the eyes of Ellen’s producers with our #LetBeautyRing campaign.

**Misty Copeland**
Misty Copeland is an American ballet dancer for the American Ballet Theater, one of the most prestigious classical ballet companies in the United States. In mid-2015, Times Magazine named her one of the most influential people in the world because Copeland became the first African American women to be promoted to principal dancer in the American Ballet Theater’s entire history. Copeland is known as a prodigy because she rose to stardom despite her lack of formal training. In addition to her ballet career, Copeland is a public speaker, celebrity spokeswomen and television star, promoted by companies such as Under Armour and Dr. Pepper.

Utilizing Misty Copeland in the Real Miss America YouTube Channel and #LetBeautyRing campaign is beneficial for multiple reasons: (1) Copeland represents two underrepresented populations - African Americans and women, (2) Copeland’s physique is built of pure muscle and represents strength instead of a motivation towards thinness, and lastly (3) Copeland’s success and achievement comes from hard work and perseverance in the face of diversity. These are all qualities of a spokeswoman for the Real Miss America campaign.

The US Women’s National Soccer Team

The United States Women’s National Soccer Team represents the United States in international soccer competitions. The team is one of the most successful teams in international women’s soccer history, and American sport in general. They won three Women’s World Cup titles and four Olympic Women’s Gold medals in their entire existence, flawlessly beating the record of the United States Men’s National Soccer Team. The team is one out of two teams to be ranked number one in the FIFA Women’s World Rankings.

Similarly to Misty Copeland, the United States Women’s National Soccer Team embodies characteristics that the REAL Miss America wants to portray our Youtube channel. The team represents various races, ethnic and cultural identities, and gender and sexual orientations. All women have healthy, strong bodies that are built through good nutrition and routine training. These women represent motivation, determination and perseverance. Their achievements and successes are not measured by their physical appearance, but rather in their athlete giftedness. These are the qualities the REAL Miss America wants to portray in the YouTube channel.

Successful Media Literacy Project

Altering the Dominant Media Landscape

Our project, The Real Miss America, would alter the media landscape by challenging the hegemonic images of beauty that are portrayed in popular culture. The definition of beauty extends far beyond young, skinny, Caucasian women with winning smiles, and we intend to show that. This YouTube channel will share new images and stories that contrast the media’s current representation of women.

As it functions now, the media does not do justice to portraying minorities in the media well, if at all. Just like the focus group of women with physical disabilities felt that they were not represented in the media because no one on the screen looked like them, other minorities also face symbolic annihilation by being absent from the screen (Wolf, Krakow, Taft, 2012). Even when media claims to be “real,” such as in reality television, the portrayals of women are unflattering and emphasize the importance of physical beauty in order to reach happiness. In order to change the discourse about feminine beauty, our YouTube channel will very conscientiously include women of color, various ages, body types, physical and mental abilities, and ethnicities. We will expand the landscape to
include personal elements, not just physical beauty. With the candid interviews we will conduct with women, we will highlight their individuality. Dominant themes in the media’s representation of women are sexualization, perfection, and above all, a very specific type of physique (small, light skinned, and young). The landscape that we will be creating with our media will be much more inclusive and authentic.

In order to affect the current landscape as much as possible, we will also purposefully include women in the process of creating new media (new media referring specifically to Internet media and video games). Rather than “preach to the masses” about this topic, our team is excited to personally interview women and have authentic conversations with them. As they share themselves with us on camera, these women will have a hand in the creation of the media, and will hopefully seek out our campaign on our other social media platforms, and then continue the conversation we have started with her among her friends. Research from Wilksch, Wade, and Literat shows that media literacy education programs are much more effective when the subjects work in small groups or create new media themselves (2009, 2014). Therefore, we predict that as we invite women to critically analyze and challenge the dominant media landscape will leave them will leave these short conversations feeling more conscious of what they see in the media. While the conversation sparks her interest and gets her to think in a different way about the world around her, we are also assuming that by featuring women individually they will feel honored and special enough to inspired to be more confident in their own skin. While this attention on one individual at a time may seem like a bit of a “grassroots” approach, we are predicting it to have to have an incredibly strong impact on the people it reaches.

Given that the nature of YouTube is considerably less formal and syndicated that television shows, our media product will have a very different literal landscape than the media we are trying to challenge. In comparison to the hyperreality that is the Miss America stage, the sidewalk, coffee shop, or grocery store in which we choose to interview women about themselves will bring the dialogue about beauty and pageantry off of the stage, taking some of the power away from those who are currently controlling all of it. We are also anticipating that this casual setting will be more comfortable to the women we are featuring, thereby allowing them to see that one’s own beauty can be a part of everyday life, and pageant beauty does not need to be confined to the stage or to the women who (according to the media) posses it now.

Also, given the informality of the setting and the power of the message, we hope that women viewing our interviews will see that creating their own media and furthering the dialogue is not difficult. Women that we do not meet or interview but still want to be part of the process can send in their own videos, post on our Facebook page, or tag us on Instagram or Twitter when they want to share their story, show us their talent, or simply tell us why they are feeling confident that day.

While our main target audience is clearly women, we will need to include men in the dialogue in order to effectively alter the media landscape. Though it may seem that issues with feminine beauty only affect women, our team believes that any issue that affects half of the population must have an impact on the other gender as well. Our team wants to have everyone involved in changing this discourse about idealized beauty create a stronger push against the dominance of those ideals.

Successful media literacy, in any form, has the power to alter the dominant media landscape. However, by including minority women in the conversation about hegemonic ideals of beauty, we are including voices that are largely not a part of the current representation of the population. Our slogan, “Let beauty ring” is an encouraging message for women to be themselves and own whatever skin color, waist size, and abilities God gave them. Just as we are all born with inalienable rights as Americans, we all have the right to define our own beauty as women living in this country. The discourse we will have with women who aren’t generally a part of the dominant media landscape allows those who are considered “minorities” to tell their stories, show us their best selves, and most importantly, own the title of “Miss America.”

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