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# MIDDLE SCHOOL TECHNOLOGY AND MEDIA LITERACY: AN ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY

by

MEKISHA RENAÉ PARKS

Under the Direction of Amira Jarmakani

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative action research case study seeks to modify a Middle School Computer Science Course at a medium-sized private school in North Atlanta, Georgia by examining the intersection of media literacy, technology, and adolescent teens. The main purpose of this project is to improve the course by incorporating media literacy skills into the curriculum. Guided class discussions, active participant observation, participant journals, and participant projects will be used to learn more about students' experience with Media Literacy education. Centering on reflective practices, teacher-student dialogue, and peer collaboration, this project aims to identify, engage, and explore issues critical to the effective implementation of a new Media Literacy curriculum. The findings from this completed project shall be made available to school administration and the larger community for the continued improvement of the Middle School Computer Science program.

INDEX WORDS: Media Literacy, Middle school technology, 21<sup>st</sup> Century learners, Action Research

MIDDLE SCHOOL TECHNOLOGY AND MEDIA LITERACY: AN ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY

by

MEKISHA RENAÉ PARKS

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2009

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2009

MIDDLE SCHOOL TECHNOLOGY AND MEDIA LITERACY: AN ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY

by

MEKISHA RENAÉ PARKS

Committee Chair: Amira Jarmakani

Committee: Susan Talburt

Layli Phillips

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to my big brother; I hope I make you proud.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, special thank you to all of my Computer Science students, your exuberant candor made this project possible. Thank you also to my committee members Susan and Layli; your insights were invaluable. To Kara, Gail, Randolph, Lorenzo, Travis, Melanie, Justice, Penny, Liza, Joanne, Rine, Rick, Kirk, Chris, Theresa, Carmen, Andrew, and Laurie your faith and encouragements mean the world to me. Finally, deep and lasting gratitude goes to my advisor. This project would not have made it out of my brain and onto these pages without your insight, grace, humor, and patience; thank you Amira for your unflagging support and enthusiasm. Your keen intellect, nonexistent ego, and fierce loyalty inspire me to be a better teacher and person.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

My formative educational experiences were filled with supportive teachers and abundant opportunities to learn socially relevant, and therefore engaging, tools and skills. As I enter into my eighth year of teaching at a college preparatory middle school in Atlanta, I continue to reflect upon the effectiveness of my professional efforts toward this end for my students; I want to provide my students with unique and germane learning opportunities. Frequently I ask myself, “How can I better understand the lives of my students outside of the classroom, so that I might better reach them inside the classroom?” This project is my exploration into this question; and I hypothesize that its answer lies at the juncture of technology, popular culture, and media literacy education. For my students, contemporary society centers on the fast pace of technological advances, the new challenges associated with being a twenty-first century student, and the bevy of socially constructed meanings that populate visual culture within the U.S. This institution-supported and curriculum-based program attempts to encourage and support teens as they incorporate technology and media literacy skills to access, identify, and analyze a sub-section of this visual culture.

### Research Questions

This endeavor seeks to introduce a media literacy experience, whose central theme of critical image analysis provides new learning opportunities for adolescent teens. This project uses a definition of Media literacy posited by the Center for Media Literacy’s (CML) cofounder, Elizabeth Thoman, and President/CEO Tessa Jolls . Their CML *Media Lit Kit* (2008) specifically defines media literacy as, “...a 21<sup>st</sup> century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and participate using messages in a variety of forms—from

print to video to the internet”(p. 42). They go on to intimate the importance of media literacy education for the maintenance and growth of democracy by saying, “Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens...” (ibid). This project defines critical image analysis as the deconstruction, or strategic disassembling, of still media images; and it examines the ways that a small group of middle-school students at a private school in Atlanta, Georgia, engage images and media messages from printed magazines and the Internet. This course works to reveal hidden aspects of the production process for the digital images students come across: namely the fundamental building blocks of visual language—camera angles, lighting, composition; the basic aspects of visual text analysis—body language, background, clothing; and the elemental structure of advertisements—tools of persuasion, prevalence of media placement, and niche or target marketing.

The central research questions of this study follow:

- (1) What media messages do my students find in images published for a teenage audience?
- (2) How do students interact with the messages found within these popular culture images?

The student and teacher roles in this class did not strictly follow the template of teacher-as-sole-information-purveyor and students-as-sole-information-seekers; to be sure, the success of this project depended on their ability and willingness to transition from the role of the student to the role of instructor and back again. Exchange of information with my students was an imperative: I offered them technological instruction and an introduction to basic media literacy skills and gained a better understanding of how my students interact with technology and

media messages. I hoped that students, at the conclusion of this course, would demonstrate a better understanding of the processes and technology used to create media messages and analyze complex cultural processes embedded within the media as well. Students deconstructed contemporary media samples, identified patterns in form and content, produced their own media using the techniques introduced in class, and used journal writing to articulate their responses to the thematic patterns they found. The information they provided not only affected the experience of this iteration of the class, but that of future iterations as well.

### **Review of Literature**

While the socially constructed messages in media images speak to people of different ethnic backgrounds, economic classes, religious affiliations, and genders, many create very limited and limiting narratives about identity. The impetus for this project stemmed from my curiosity about how adolescents in particular are affected by these narratives. In my experience, students had an intimate relationship with technology and popular culture outside of the classroom setting; they were digitally native to texting, TMZ-ing, TiVo-ing, Skyping, MySpace-ing, Twittering, IM-ing, Face booking, YouTube-ing, etc. They spent their downtime navigating among these and other popular culture outlets. Their comfort among these popular culture technologies, however, did not always indicate to me a critical awareness of the societal forces at work in their play. My curiosity piqued around what might happen when my students were given a chance to bring their extracurricular interests into the classroom; how might they engage the media images and messages they encountered within the context of schooling? Also, how might their perceptions of reality be affected, if at all, by understanding the technological contributions to media image production and manipulation? In what ways might they accept, reject, and negotiate obvious and subtle messages from popular culture with this

new knowledge? This action research study served as a springboard for open dialogue with all the adolescent students in my class about these questions and more.

In much the same way that this project aimed to address the juncture of technology, popular culture, and media literacy education with adolescent students, the literature that served to ground it met at the juncture of different theoretical fields. This literature review combines theories that both explain the process of social learning and offer media literacy education as a possible response to the socialization processes. While many debate whether images are able at all to influence identity formation in young men and women, there are many competing theories about the ways that these messages manifest themselves through socialization in adolescents. Linda Holtzman (2000) defines socialization as “the total set of experiences in which children become clear about norms and expectations and learn how to function as respected and accepted members of culture” and goes on to say that, “Through socialization children learn to choose a more limited set of behaviors based on these expectations” (p. 18). Holtzman discusses various ways that this socialization of children occurs, including the system of positive reinforcement for social mimicry. Within this system of psychological, emotional, or physical reward, the attainment of the promised reward depends on successful mimicry of the desired behavior. For example, a young boy who watches his older brother receive adoration and positive attention for accomplishing his first sports action, i.e. catching a baseball or throwing a spiral football pass, learns that those behaviors might also garner him accolades and respect should he mimic them. Conversely, if this same young boy were to watch and mimic his mothers’ make-up routine and receive reprimand or negative attention, he might learn that those behaviors cause him ridicule and disrespect, thereby

helping him to internalize the types of actions that are socially acceptable for him and those which are not.

Holtzman explains this process of social learning with Albert Bandura's *Social Learning Theory*. Based in a theory of hegemony, this process of socialization depends on repetitive observations of external phenomena from various sources including family, church, school, and mass media and it indicates an internalization of particular messages about identity through mimicking behavior and the promise of both internal and external reward; the reward, not solely mimicking behavior, serves as the precursor to particular societal messages becoming "truth," "reality," or "social learning" (p. 18). It should also be noted here that these "social norms" of society, according to Antonio Gramsci's discussions of cultural hegemony, get defined for the masses by a small percentage of the culturally elite. Gramsci defines cultural hegemony as "'the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production" (Martin, 2002). Holtzman (2000) adds that this cultural hegemony cannot be maintained by force, "but rather through the way that values get taught in religious, educational, and media institutions--through socialization. The structure and values of hegemony are often invisible" (p.26). While the historical and political contexts to which Gramsci applies his theory of cultural hegemony are not fully addressed here, his theory is used to help account for the repetitive messages we found in contemporary media about masculinity, femininity, economic status, global relationships, standards of beauty, and boundaries of normalcy. Many of these repetitive messages serve to reinforce and reproduce the "misinformation" that Holtzman discusses.

Alongside Bandura's theory of *social learning*, Holtzman (2000) posits her theory—*cycle of oppression*—which describes socialization as a four-step cycle: the receipt of misinformation, internalization of misinformation, transmission of misinformation to others, and repetition of the cycle and delineates its relationship to oppression (pp. 28-29). This theory allows for socialization that reveals the limited and limiting origins of the culture and norms of our society as a counterbalance to “the misinformation that contributes to racism, sexism, homophobia, and class oppression” (p. 30). The proliferation of digitally manipulated or photo-shopped images in popular culture illustrates a rich example of the misinformation to which Holtzman refers. My students and I spent time during this study analyzing representations that expertly use “photo-shopping” to blur the lines between fact and fiction. Holtzman (2000) claims that the *cycle of oppression* begins during the early years of development with exposure to biased histories and misinformation by trusted people, systems, and institutions; it continues as identity formation hits its stride and adolescents struggle with received messages and lived experiences. During this time, some adolescents have difficulty reconciling the messages they get from the media and those they get through their own life experiences; in fact, some discount their own lived experiences as abnormal in favor of what they have internalized from the media (p. 29). To counteract internalized misinformation, there must be a widening of understanding, sustained and intentional identification of and unlearning of misinformation, and attention to critical thinking skills.

For instance, a twelve-year-old girl who has been exposed to the media-based notion that all “normal body types” for women fit into the narrowly defined trends in popular culture must have more than one or two life experiences of women with different types of bodies to address her internalized socialization. Perhaps, having many women in her circle of family and

friends whose bodies do not fit the media-created standard, and direct and intentional conversations with those women about their ideas and her own ideas of “normalcy” could disrupt this cycle of socialization more effectively. *Liberation theory* follows and extends the *Cycle of oppression* and *Social learning theories*, by incorporating a political slant to socialization, which proposes “we can individually and institutionally observe, recognize, rethink, and interrupt the misinformation and negative messages around us, changing how we see ourselves and others” (p. 19). The way that Holtzman (2000) suggests that individuals resist these processes of socialization, called reconstructing knowledge, is a process that “requires an openness to questioning what has been learned before, a willingness to assess and incorporate new information, a tolerance for interim confusion, and ultimately the ability to make shifts in how we view the world” (p. 15). Like Paulo Freire’s theory of co-intentional education, individuals occupy both the role of teacher and student as they use “common reflection and action” to reformulate and rebuild knowledge; thereby making themselves “permanent re-creators” (p. 56). This research project, a Media literacy curriculum, serves as my means to begin the reconstruction of knowledge with my students. The input they give to this study could potentially help teachers in this community and other interested stakeholders better understand how media production works and how it might be possible to eventually talk back to the misinformation that shapes identity.

Literature on early media education and training and criticism in the U.S. centered on the censorship of media outlets. Often driven by concerned parents, churches, and other community groups, the main thrust of media education was to find ways to prevent young audiences from being exposed to what they deemed to be inappropriate media messages found in movies, advertisements, and television programs alike. The tone, however, changed with the

introduction of educators and researchers into this discussion; the landscape of its media literacy programs developed a less moralistic tone. Brown (1998) notes that as educators and researchers entered the field of media analysis, “Media criticism became increasingly pluralistic, nondirective, and non-value-laden” (p. 46). This project seeks to follow the trend that Brown refers to above and add a media literacy curriculum class to the offerings of my school that does not embrace censorship, but seeks out critical thinking as a worthwhile response to media messages of all types. This project worked together with adolescents to develop a media literacy curriculum that increases teen understanding of the messages and the construction techniques of the media.

Scharrer (2002) states that a critical curriculum’s effectiveness depends on the length and breadth of student exposure to media literacy interventions. Cognitive development or the acquiring new knowledge about “media messages, practices, processes, institutions, or influence” is a goal of this study (p. 1). The topics of import within media literacy easily fill decades of education and research for even the highest level scholars, accordingly this fifteen-week course attempted to provide a limited, age-appropriate introduction to participants. Further topics under examination for participants include, “strategies used in advertising to encourage favorable responses; awareness of the ways that violence is shown in the media that make it look cool; or attention to roles that women, people of color, and other ‘minorities’ are given in the media” (ibid). Scharrer (2002) acknowledges that longer exposure to media literacy education can deepen the knowledge gained and the understanding of the nuance of media messages. She says, “if participation contributes to a student’s approval of some media messages, practices, processes, institutions, or influence and the disapproval of others, this, too, is a laudable accomplishment of media literacy” (ibid). Beginning a curriculum like this at

the middle school grade levels lays the groundwork for future classes, and therefore facilitates a prolonged exposure to media education. Following from the question of why both boys and girls might benefit from a media literacy education, attention turns to the practical applications and curricular history of media literacy. The research about media literacy provides a theoretical structure for this case study and explains “how” media literacy works. Specifically Holtzman (2000), Van Zoonen (1994) and Wheeler (2002) help articulate the practical ways that popular culture meanings can be deconstructed, while Scharrer (2002) and Brown (1998) outline the curricular history of media education. Holtzman (2000) explains the mechanics of media messages; she argues that entertainment media serve to fill in gaps between the formal/informal education and lived experiences of its audience through simplified, stereotyped, or incomplete images. Van Zoonen (1994) works to study the other side of messages, or the ways that gender gets encoded within the structuring of images and gaze. Van Zoonen (1994), like Holtzman, uses a feminist approach to frame the historical background of debates within popular culture studies. She answers the question about how gender discourse and media texts interact by arguing that the specific historical and cultural contexts of particular media are bound inextricably with the content of media images and messages. She cautions against, however, viewing media institutions as ideological scapegoats, “producing univocal, sexist, capitalist and patriarchal content” (p 43). She ultimately investigates whether media content can be significantly affected by its structure and it is at this moment that her research speaks most closely to this project. One of the final components of this study was the creation of media images and messages by the participants. The success of this aspect of the course hinged on the ways in which media messages are affected by production processes—namely post production, digital alterations using Photoshop or similar software. As students gained a better

understanding of the post-production tinkering that often characterized the images they encountered in the media, they began to recognize that the constructed nature of the images greatly affected their responses to the messages they found there. Wheeler (2002) focuses his research on the ethics and history of photographic manipulations, but insists that there is no pre-existing state of "pure photography." He says,

Any discussion of "manipulated" photography must begin with the recognition that photography itself is an inherent manipulation—a manipulation of light, a process with many steps and stages, all subject to the biases and interpretations of the photographer, printer, editor, or viewer. Photography is not absolute "reality." It is not unqualified "truth." It is not purely "objective." It was never any of those things, and it has been subject to distortion since its inception. Indeed, many of its earliest practitioners were more concerned with concocting fantasy than documenting reality.  
(p. 3)

The understanding that photographs have historically been quite subjective in this way, combined with the reality that manipulation techniques have advanced greatly since photographic origins, places a higher premium on the ability of participants to recognize and identify, the processes at work in media images.

### **Adolescence and Environmental Pressures**

The students within this study are seventh graders; they are in the middle of the three-year span from sixth to eighth grade. During these three years, students experience a multitude of physical, academic, social, and perhaps emotional changes in their lives. It must be acknowledged at the outset, however, that these particular teenagers occupy a specific and privileged experience: they are allowed to go to school daily as their main occupation and they attend school within a relatively safe and secure environment. My use, then, of the term "adolescence" applies to this narrowly defined group of individuals, though I do not intend to claim this as the experience of all adolescent students. Nearly all my students have 24-hour

access to multiple media outlets: television, internet, cell phones, etc., and have been exposed to tens of thousands of hours of popular culture media by the time they graduate from high school. The saturation of their daily lives with media is rarely counterbalanced with opportunities to intentionally and critically analyze what they see and investigate how it affects them within an academic setting.

It should also be noted that adolescence does not always mean a time of identity crisis for adolescents. For example, some of my students, due to a combination of life experiences, familial support, maturity, worldview, or other significant factors seem to maintain firm footing through the physical and emotional changes of adolescence while others seem to get overwhelmed. "Few developmental periods are characterized by so many changes at so many different levels--changes due to pubertal development, social role redefinitions, cognitive development, school transitions, and the emergence of sexuality" (Eccles et al, p.92). The physical changes of puberty alone, which usually occurs during this time, can mean fluctuating levels and mixtures of bodily hormones that manifest themselves by rapid overall physical growth and other outward differences. Though parents generally expect bodily differences in their sons and daughters around this age, the set of physical changes--like the appearance of underarm, facial, or pubic hair, the beginning of reproduction cycles, and changes in voice timber and breast size, can still result in elevated levels of stress in both the students and their families. As these transformations then get combined with other academic and social changes that also happen around this time, my students often experience increased feelings of self-consciousness and uncertainty. The academic reality for students as they enter middle school in this community is also quite different and may only add to feelings of self-doubt for some. The structure that they depended on from lower school becomes a bit more demanding and at

times more confusing as well. It starts with the change from one set of teacher expectations in one static classroom during fifth grade to multiple teacher expectations and changing classrooms in sixth grade. Then, they encounter the added responsibility of keeping track of their supplies, homework, and selves with new lockers, a new building, and a new rotating schedule. Many students falter in the beginning, frequently misplacing important items, forgetting assigned duties, and losing their way. Lastly, they must learn to advocate for themselves when they need help as their parents take on a less “hands-on” role in the classroom. Many students find themselves, some for the first time, in need of help from others and without the confidence to reach out: they do not want to be labeled as “not smart,” “not capable,” or “not cool,” because they had to ask for assistance. Socially, students find themselves similarly uncertain as they traverse the constantly changing landscape of friendships and social groups. During my experiences in the classroom, on the athletic field of play, and in the other social spaces that kids occupy--the cafeteria, recess, hallways, and carpool lines, I have witnessed the turbulent social climate first-hand. As parent-directed play-dates, make way for kid-directed invitations, students jockey to find a group of friends that they like, which in turn likes them. They do this with the knowledge that being invited to the right outing, the movies, a party, or a sleepover, can instantly catapult them into coveted group membership as quickly as a passing text, email, or glance in the hallway can unceremoniously remove them. In this climate, instances of feeling left out, uninvited, and betrayed are rampant; from this is born a fervent desire to fit in, be cool, and exude (even if it is faked) confidence. To be sure, there are students in this community who move gracefully through this rugged terrain with minimal adversity, but sadly they are often the exception, not the rule.

One of these sets of circumstances alone can certainly be daunting, but all of them together in this small window of time creates interesting and compelling narratives for these youngsters. The unbridled changes occurring within the minds, hearts, and bodies of my students as they move through adolescence heightens the importance of adult presence, empathy, and wisdom about their peer-peer interactions during this time. Teens need to know that they have adult allies that really care. Kilbourne (1999), in her work *Deadly Persuasion: Why Women and Girls Must Fight the Addictive Power of Advertising*, speaks to the consequences of this imbalance; she claims that most teenagers “find it difficult to resist or even to question the dominant cultural messages perpetuated and reinforced by the media” (p. 129). This imbalance becomes even more precarious when considering the fact that our digital capabilities render most contemporary, popular culture images expert fusions of photography and artistic vision. Wheeler (2002) reports that the practice of photographic modification has been known “not only to remove blemishes and facial lines but also to brighten eyes; to whiten, straighten, or replace teeth; to change clothing; even to sculpt physiques” (p. 183). Many of my students, unfortunately, leave these images and their accompanying messages uninterrogated, thus deepening the impact of these lessons of socialization. Even in the face of painful inconsistencies that leave their sense of self and capacity for self-advocacy in peril, the “misinformation” found in digitally altered, popular culture images, continues to go unquestioned and contributes to feelings of detached ineptitude in some of its audience as it offers fantasy figures that cannot be attained by flesh and blood readers.

Certainly exposure to and interactions with the images and messages of popular culture begin well before and continue well after the years of adolescence; however, significant physical, emotional, and social development occur within this particular period which amplifies

the influence of these images and their messages. The adolescent desires to fit in, be “normal,” and be accepted affects both boys and girls. Pipher (1994) explains that “early adolescence is a time of physical and psychological change, self-absorption, preoccupation with peer approval and identity formation” (pp. 23-24). She speaks directly to the experience of adolescent girls by saying, “With puberty, girls face enormous cultural pressure to split into false selves. The pressure comes from schools, magazines, music, television, advertisements and movies” (p. 38). The fear of peer abandonment tempts many to “reject their true selves and be socially acceptable” (ibid). Accordingly, this research project proposes a consistent and intentional education that discusses, critically analyzes, and technically deconstructs some of the fallacies of popular image production as a way for students to better negotiate these obstacles. The responses of both male and female adolescents to the media are influenced by the intersections of many social factors like race, class, sexual orientation, religion, economic status, and able-bodiedness. The emotional, spiritual, and mental stakes remain high, while bodily estrangement and dissatisfaction in an era of ubiquitous plastic surgery and physical “enhancements” also pose very serious physical consequences as well. As our society reaches unparalleled levels of image saturation and consumption-towards-self-improvement, boys and girls must be given the space and language to decipher between and among the many permutations of fact, fiction, and what lies between.

While extensive research has been done documenting the effects of media images on adolescent girls, more research has begun to be available about the effects of media images on adolescent boys. The existing body of research surrounding this idea can be separated into two main categories: feminist-based research on the effects of normative ideologies on the physical and emotional development in adolescent girls and communication-based research on media

messages: what they are, what they do, how they work, etc. Bordo (1993), Brumberg (1997), and Douglas (1994) help articulate the ways that both boys and girls are “affected,” both physically and emotionally, by media images. Their arguments link various aspects of media representation to particular ideologies about male and female sexuality, bodily practices, and consumerist behaviors. Douglas (1994) declares that, “...there’s little doubt that a pathological level of self-consciousness is what being an adolescent is all about, at least in America. But for girls, self-scrutiny—of our thighs, our pores, our eyebrows, our breasts, our hair follicles, our cuticles, and our ‘true’ inner selves—was drummed in by magazines like *Seventeen*, *Glamour*, *Teen*, and *Mademoiselle*, with their increasingly skinny models...” (p. 99). These arguments help identify specific messages that young girls get from the media: like “being successful is easy when you are thin and beautiful,” and “purchasing the right products can fix your flaws and make you a worthwhile person.” Botta (2003) delineates an important gendered difference within body image—one of the major themes of media messages. She declares that for boys the comparisons in popular culture images were “linked to muscularity” which could be an “important measure of unhealthy body behaviors for boys that in extreme cases is comparable to anorexia nervosa in girls”(Botta, 2003). The thinness ideal in girls and the muscularity ideal in boys prevalent in research speak to the physical effects that media messages can have on adolescents regardless of gender.

To be sure, the possible emotional consequences associated with boys, girls, and pop culture images are no less severe than their physical counterparts. Douglas (1994) speaks to how media messages encourage girls’ reactionary consumption because it effectively keeps them occupied with trying to reconcile themselves to an idea of femininity that is illusory; she speaks of her own experience by saying the media “exaggerated our psychic schizophrenia, our

sense of being a mosaic of traits that didn't quite fit together" (p. 100). Bordo (1999) goes on to reveal the emotional consequences that boys may face as a result of the social ideology of boyhood or manhood; she says, "But a price is paid for the 'hardening' of boys (as Pollack calls it): they learn to become anesthetized to both physical and emotional pain and to keep it to themselves. He cites studies which show that by the time a boy reaches junior high school, one in ten of them has been kicked in the groin—yet the majority never tell an adult about it" (p. 57). This physical hardening of boys often decreases, severely depresses, or entirely roots out their ability to be vulnerable and empathetic in later years; this hardening helps socialize away the connection of many men and their free emotional expression.

#### **Data Collection Procedures and Methods**

The principles of action research frame this project. It facilitates a systematic gathering of information about the inner workings of a specific educational environment and calls for ongoing self-reflection and adjustment. The term "action research," coined in the mid 1930's by German-born psychologist, Kurt Lewin, provides a strong foundation for the introduction and improvement of this media literacy curriculum. According to Adelman (1993), Lewin viewed research as an endeavor that "gives credence to the development of powers of reflective thought, discussion, decision and action by ordinary people" (p. 8). The action research group based in America has its roots in the progressive education movement and the work of early American educator John Dewey. Conducted by those within the education system about problems that occur in the classroom, action researchers historically use qualitative methods to effect an educational intervention in their own teaching environments. Unlike traditional research environments that seek to isolate and control variables, action research works to describe what is happening in the classroom and take action to improve the situation. The

decision to begin a media literacy curriculum for my students places this project right in the middle of Stringer's (1996) Action Research Interacting Spiral; which calls for looking, thinking, and acting as a "continually recycling set of activities"(pp. 16-17). Self-reflection remains critical to thoughtfully enacting this research project because the information gathered at any time during this process significantly impacts the remaining format and content of the study. Lewin's model of self-reflexive research can be identified by its main components: "reconnaissance, planning, first action step, monitoring, reflecting, rethinking, and evaluation" (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). It is this constant looking back, in particular, that holds the most importance in this project; it allows for day-to-day, class-to-class, quarter-to-quarter, or year-to-year evaluations and adjustments, which directly informs the creation, modification, and extension of the proposed media literacy curriculum. My administration afforded me the freedom to change the direction, assignments, and overall grading of this course as needed. When a project proved to be too cumbersome or the work load too heavy, I was able to adjust and apply those changes as early as the next quarter class. The freedom to respond to the organic nature of the class made it very easy to be self-reflective during this process. Van Manen (1990) even applies the concept of self-reflection to the topic of Action research as a practice. After extensive experience in the field he looks at the ways that Action research might be evaluated. Specifically he critiques the assumptions about the democracy of teacher-student relationships, the role of external knowledge in a localized action research, the automatic reflection/action-change notion, and the teacher-as-researcher within a research project. Most important to this case study is the assumption about the democracy of the teacher-student relationship. He says,

A unique asymmetry of maturity, dependency, and responsibility exists in the relation between educator and student. The

pedagogical relation is by nature a relation between an adult and a child, between a more mature and a less mature person, between a person who is experienced and a person who is less experienced in the ways of the world...As a result of the asymmetry of this relation the adult carries an unshakable responsibility for the becoming of the child. (p.153)

The process of creating this curriculum within the parameters of an actual Computer Science course that has assignments, assessments, and a final grade increased the onus on me as researcher to avoid what Van Manen calls the tendency of adults to “destroy the pedagogical relation that a healthy upbringing and adequate education requires” (ibid). I had to be careful that my desire to pursue a better understanding of media literacy and the media messages that my students found did not detract from a classroom with clearly articulated goals, expectations, and procedures. I was very diligent to fulfill the academic, social, and emotional needs of the students in my care.

The project hinged on understanding what my adolescent students communicated to me about their encounters with media, the curriculum in this course, and most importantly one another. Brown (1998) states that it is in this last element that the most interesting information lies; he says that the best way to measure “a medium's impact is study of the interaction between audience members and that medium, as well as their interaction with peers and surrounding viewing context”(p. 48). Accordingly, this course used an “interactionist approach” for adolescent viewers of teen magazines. The curriculum-as-planned addressed skill development, consciousness-raising, and explorations about media messages, but the curriculum-as-enacted provided information about how adolescents interact with one another and with me within this media literacy course. The former looked formally at what students knew about media literacy, what they learned about it during the course, and how they were able to demonstrate that knowledge. Specifically, I examined how students thought formally

about media literacy topics within class discussions, used media literacy vocabulary effectively in journal assignments and applied those concepts to media-tech projects. This part of the approach adapted a pre-existing set of media literacy resources to my specific class. It allowed for a dynamic and responsive set of activities, questions, and assignments that fit the needs of my students: their unique entry points into media literacy and the pace with which they learn. The latter focused on the ways that the cultural make-up of our classroom influenced the data collected. Over the course of the class, close attention was paid to the dynamic relationships each student had with one another and with me and the changes in the level of comfort or interest students had for specific topics. Accordingly, the approach for this project accounted for formal discussions and pre-set inquiries, but also welcomed any organic issues stemming from the cultural, gender, ethnic, and economic diversity within the class. These interactions hold great value in understanding my second research question, “How do students interact with the messages found within these popular culture images?”

### **Bounding the Study**

This research took place in the 2008-2009 school year within a seventh-grade Computer Science course. Of the fifteen, co-educational, seventh-grade students cited in this study, the ethnic make up was fourteen Caucasian students and one African American (6.7%) student. The gender break down was twelve female (80%) to three male (20%). A similar break down of all the one hundred twenty total seventh-graders in the middle school reveal one hundred eleven (92.5%) of the students were identified as Caucasian and nine (7.5%) were identified as African American, Asian, or Latino; while fifty were boys (41.7%) and seventy (58.3%) were girls. It should be noted here that the names of the students within this study have been changed to protect their identity. The pseudonyms of my participants are as follows:

Janet, Celeste, Cynthia, Tiffany, Brandy, Jasmin, Bryan, Mark, Leslie, Denise, Candice, Susie, Travis, Julie, and Tabitha. We met for 15 fifty-minute class sessions in a closed-door classroom and pursued a nine-week curriculum that combined basic computer instruction on Macintosh Laptops and an investigation of Media literacy principles. Students' participation included five media literacy journal entries, four media & technology (media-tech) projects, one final project journal and five class discussions. Student journals included predetermined writing prompts and project reflection, offering independent opportunities for students to review, process, and apply the media literacy skills encountered during class lessons. The four media-tech projects allowed students to explore aspects of media production and create popular culture artifacts. This active investigation and creation process was key to the Center of media Literacy's tenets of media literacy. The media-tech projects, which were completed individually and in groups, also required the use of specific software—Microsoft Office Suite programs, iWork 08 programs, and Adobe Photoshop, all of which were accessible to participants at the research-site. As part of a new, school-sponsored technology initiative, all students in the middle school had access to their own Mac Book Laptop. They also had ready access to other supplementary technologies —i.e. wireless Internet, laser printers, digital cameras, fire-wires, scanners, and video cameras. Assignment descriptions, media literacy topic lessons, explanations for technology projects, technical instructions on the use of all necessary equipment, and the majority of work on the media-tech projects happened within class time. This course design encouraged students to see themselves and their peers as more than simply consumers of popular culture images, but as producers of it as well.

The data collection methods used in this qualitative action research project included participant observation, unstructured focus group interviews, student journals and document

analysis of individual/group artifacts. Creswell (2002) defines participant observer as “an observational role adopted by researchers when they take part in activities in the setting they observe” (p. 200). The degree to which the observer participates varies from “active participant,” “privileged observer,” and “active observer” (Pelto & Pelto, 1978, Spradley, 1980; Wolcott, 1997). Throughout the course, however, I spent more time as a participant than an observer; occupying the role of “active participant” as the only teacher and adult in the room. Mills (2003) posits that, “Teachers, by virtue of teaching, are active participant observers of their teaching practice. When they are actively engaged in teaching, teachers observe the outcomes of their teaching” (p. 54). I looked for experiences and outcomes with my students and the curriculum that reinforced my expectations, disrupted those expectations, and created new expectations for the curriculum. My students and I were well aware of the difference in our statuses in the classroom; although I was the “instructor” and they the “students,” I surely learned as much from them as they did from me. They also served as “instructors” to each other. For example, during our class on Adobe Photoshop, I found that several students used the program outside of class in connection to their hobbies and I asked those students to help the students without any experience using the program. Additionally, some students found that they were “experts” on a particular task within the Photoshop program and other students looked to them for guidance if they wanted to incorporate those techniques into their projects. Creswell (2002) notes that the advantages of being an active participant observation consist of “...the opportunity to record information as it occurs in a setting, to study actual behavior, and to study individuals who have difficulty verbalizing their ideas” (p. 199). While students of this age are capable of orally articulating their responses better than their younger counterparts, they still communicate a great deal through their body language. Observations of my fifteen

students throughout each of the fifteen class meetings document the demeanors and conversations of the students as they enter the classroom, as they prepare themselves before the bell, and as they interact during class lessons and activities with attention to both individual and the inter-peer interactions with media images. These observations were read to better understand students' informal responses to the class, the curriculum, or assignments. As I was actively engaged in the act of teaching during the computer science course, I wrote a summary of my observations after each class; my researcher reflections were combined with these observational field notes and the assigned journals to see how students were answering the project research questions. Unstructured, focus group interviews, also known in this project as in-class discussions, allowed for better insight from the class about their comprehension of the media literacy skills we used in class, their interactions with media outside of class, and their shared experience of the media generally. The open-ended nature of the responses associated with unstructured interviews fits this qualitative study because, as Creswell (2002) confirms, "...the researcher asks open-ended questions that permit the participant to create response possibilities" (p. 205). He goes on to say that, "This type of interview represents the most frequently used form of interviewing in qualitative research" (ibid). Focus groups, "...the process of collecting data through interviews with a group of people..." works advantageously when, "...the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information and when interviewees are similar to and cooperative with each other" (p. 206). Mills (2003) agrees with Creswell by saying, "Focus groups are a particularly useful technique when the interaction between individuals will lead to a shared understanding of the questions being posed by the teacher researcher" (p. 62). Combining unstructured interview processes with the multiple participant setup of a focus group seemed to make sense for this type of inquiry. Five of the

most important questions posed in these sessions come from the Center of Media Literacy's Media Kit and are as follows:

- (1) Why is this message being sent?
- (2) Who created this message?
- (3) What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
- (4) How might different people understand this message differently?
- (5) What values, lifestyles, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?

These questions serve as signposts during the class and help focus the journal assignments and the media-tech projects. I looked at these class discussions with attention to the class' evolving definition of media literacy, development of technical knowledge and skills, and expressions of ways the class (and thereby the media literacy curriculum) could be improved. Group discussions offered an opportunity to collect data in an environment where the participants interacted with the researcher, the course content, and each other. These class discussions worked best, however, when used in concert with other methods, like content analysis of written data sources as well.

Content analysis of student journal entries and a deep analysis of the final media-technology project and journal complete the methods in this case study. The journal assignments span the course and speak specifically to the media literacy skills being developed in class. Mills (2003) says that students' journals, "... can provide teachers with a valuable window into the students' world (in much the same way that homework assignments provide parents with insights into their children's daily experiences)" (p. 67). In these journals I look

specifically for evidence of student understanding of the media literacy skills and the five entries in student journals have predetermined topics and specific links to concepts introduced during class (see Appendix D).

The analysis of documents produced during class refers directly to the final media-technology project and its journal. In this project students analyze, deconstruct, and reconstruct a teen magazine cover, using clipart, Kidpix, online images, digitized images, and/or photos from other files. Given creative license, available technologies, and instructions to create their own cover, the students closely examined the structure of contemporary, mainstream magazine covers, and the technology behind the creation of its images. The class lessons in preparation of this project emphasize an exploration of font, style, layout, image selection, magazine content, and stylistic themes. Students pay particular attention to the form of the magazine covers in mainstream, teen-targeted magazines and then have an opportunity to create their own covers using any stylistic preferences they could imagine. The purpose of this media-tech project is to allow the participants to demystify media messages through deconstruction and create their own new possibilities. Further discussions of these creative projects and the rich information they yielded can be found in the data analysis section. Mills (2003) defines these classroom artifacts as “written or visual sources of data that contribute to our understanding of what is happening in our classrooms and schools;” they allowed me to see how each individual was engaging media images and the course writ large (p. 70). The project serves as a culminating activity that allows students to demonstrate technological skill, review media literacy tenets, and reveal their unique perspective on media images. These artifacts, rich with information about how students engage media images, identify specific media messages students encountered in media images. By examining the content and format of

student artifacts, I was able to investigate the ways that they interacted with the mainstream. Though given the freedom to create new formats and choose unique content, some students decided to reproduce the content and format of other mainstream magazines. In some cases, students identified specific conventions or media messages and created intentional alternatives to the mainstream images. In other artifacts, students rejected the mainstream messages they found and supplanted them with their own messages. In the media-tech project, I looked for a subtler, more complex understanding of how students recognized patterns in mainstream media and showed evidence of expanded media knowledge or acceptance, negotiation, expansion, or rejection of these patterns. I also looked for ways that students introduced new elements to the mainstream media formula.

As no one method can produce a complete picture of a phenomenon, I used all of the aforementioned methods to triangulate the data collected. Mills (2003) affirms that it is, "... generally accepted in action research circles that researchers should not rely on any single source of data, interview, observation, or instrument" (p. 52). Accordingly, I employ at least three methods to offer a complex portrait of issues related to my specific research questions. The data sources for the first research question—What media messages do my students find in images published for a teenage audience?—include active participant observation, student journal assignments, and document analysis of the final media-tech project. The data sources for the second research question—How do students interact with the messages found within these popular culture images?—include unstructured, group interviews, active participant observations, and content analysis of the media-tech project (see Triangulation Matrix Appendix G). As the chosen methods, when taken individually, provide limited information, the triangulation of several different methods together was used in this project to best reveal

meaningful information. Multiple data sources and methods are read together in order to crosscheck phenomena found in the study. For example, observation field notes provide a context for pedagogical adjustments that need to occur in future classes: the logistical effectiveness of the class schedule, in-class assignment design, etc., while student journals were structured with specific, media-skill-focused questions so that students could showcase their command of media literacy skills and talk about the media messages they found in images published for a teenage audience.

### **Limitations and Researcher Role**

My role as a teacher and coach at the site of my study had great benefits and key limitations as well. The established rapport and common mission of improving the way students are cared for in this community afforded me a freedom in interacting with the campus, students, faculty, resources, “gate-keepers,” and administrative stakeholders of this school. During my teaching career, I have taught many students and their siblings; accordingly, I have had multiple years of interactions with the parents of many of my students. My long-standing presence in this community as an alum and teacher served to bolster, in the minds and eyes of my administration, my continued commitment to the best interest of my students and this community.

My status as a participant observer and insider, however, placed me in very close proximity to my participants and my duties as teacher, mentor, and coach. As the emotional and intellectual safety of my students was paramount, I found myself checking in often with the Middle School Counselor throughout and even after the project. Both students and parents had unfettered access to the counselor and principal, but no issues concerning the course or research arose. The creation of a space that reinforced the voluntary nature of participation

was very successful and about fifty-percent of the students decided to participate before the start of the class. After the end of the course, students were given an additional opportunity to participate if they were interested and several more students agreed to participate.

My location within this community provided a unique lens for the development of this project. As a former alum, current employee, economic and racial minority, I worked consistently to reflect upon my location within this project and explored how my research could effect positive change for both my participants and myself. One of the most positive changes that occurred as a result of this project was a new and fresh perspective on how to use the expertise in my students to help increase the amount of learning happening in class. I was able to transfer Freire's philosophy of co-intention into my other non-computer classrooms. I saw immediate dividends in allowing my sixth grade math students to be the expert on particular topics. The renewed sense of confidence and responsibility that resulted in them helped improve the overall performance of that class. Thankfully, outside of a high demand on my time, I was able to maintain student-teacher confidentiality, teacher-parent responsibility, and researcher-project integrity.

To be sure that both my adolescent participants and their families have easy access to the information from this research project, I encourage them to take advantage of my open door policy that invites them to visit to see how the new media literacy curriculum has progressed. Additionally, this study and its analyses served as a springboard to the school administration and the accreditation committee about ways we use technology to better serve all our students' changing needs. The richness of this study lay within the analysis of experiences and ideas of the teenage students with which I work. I saw students become more active analysts and savvy image producers within this visual culture in ways that not only

enhanced what it means to be a college-prepared student, but equipped them with skills that they could take with them into a rapidly changing world.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Ever-Evolving Classroom

*...I'm just another woman lost  
you are like fish in the water  
who don't know that they are wet  
as far as I can tell  
the world isn't perfect yet...  
- Ani Difranco  
Lost Woman Song*

The first bell rings, signifying the end of second period as students who were let out early from P.E gather outside the closed classroom. I open the door and students meander into my math-turned-computer science classroom, wish me a bashful good morning, and find seats as far away from the front of the room as possible. Though I taught many of them only last year, they cluster their desks close together and scoot them towards the back wall, as if for comfort, in this new seventh grade environment. As the room continues to fill with other students arriving from farther reaches of the private school campus, the low whispered murmurs increase incrementally to a louder hum filled with a few hurried greetings between friends long separated by the summer months. I wait on the last few stragglers to clear the halls and offer them a warm welcome back to the classroom where many of them had sat as sixth grade math students. Long gone are the three columns of neatly paired desks I had carefully arranged in anticipation of this first computer class. In their place are tight modules of three and four desks that students formed as they captured desks and each other to form ideal seat groupings of their own. The faces of these students, simultaneously familiar and different to me, increase in animation as they hurriedly finalize their seating arrangements and turn to face me. I offer up light banter about summer camps and family vacations to help ease the remaining first-day jitters and the second bell rings.

I look out into the class from behind my podium in the front-right corner of the room and notice that the gender split that often occurs when my students are free from assigned seating has happened again: the boys have set up shop in the back and whole left side of the classroom, while the girls amass themselves in the remaining middle and right side space. Two empty desks remain askew right up front and most students have only their laptop computers on their desk. The students know from their schedule that this is seventh grade computer science class, and they are fairly confident that this will not be a repeat of last year's keyboarding class, but they clearly do not know what else to expect. So I begin with a question, "Do you think that fish notice the water?" After several moments of shocked silence and then confused glances around the room, students tentatively offer up what they think is the right answer. Several confidently say no, a few giggle nervously to their neighbors, and one or two hesitantly mumble yes under their breath. Finally a young man in the back of the room proclaims with a loud voice, "Yes, if you remove the water!" From this unlikely metaphor, we began our discussion of Media Literacy.

The metaphor of fish and their aquatic habitat proved to be an interesting place to begin our discussions, as it, and derivatives of it, surfaced multiple times throughout the duration of this course. Jolls and Thoman (2008) say, "When one considers cell phones, social networking, video games, television, pop music, radio, newspapers, magazines, billboards, the internet—even T-shirts!—we are exposed to more mediated messages in one day than our great-grandparents were exposed to in a year" (p. 12). As the sheer amount of exposure to media, lay at the crux of the analogy, the comparison of adolescent students living ensconced in contemporary popular culture to fish seemed to make sense. With the twenty-first century environment made sufficiently water-like with its ubiquitous media formats, images, and

messages, the importance of a media literacy curriculum became clearer. My observations of the students during this discussion showed that a few of the students picked up on the connection between the fish and themselves at the start of this first class and indicated instances where they themselves had “noticed the water.” The class began listing items that they considered to be “media” and as more and more students excitedly interjected objects that they thought should be on the list, the interactive discussion moved towards an inductive definition of the term. A few girls near the front quickly named the most obvious choices: television, Internet, radio, and movies, then—after a lull in the naming—a couple of boys from the left of the room offered books, billboards, and video games. Nodding their heads in acknowledgement, the students seemed satisfied with the completeness of their list, but their satisfaction turned to surprise when I refocused our attention to the Smartboard and revealed items on the list that escaped any mention at all: blogs, wikis, podcasts, clothing and other branded products. We took a moment after the list was shown to try to name specific examples of media we noticed in the room. Then after only a few moments, students began to shout out, “his wrestling sweatshirt,” “those Nike tennis shoes,” “the white board even!” As the class drew to a close, answers to the first research question began to emerge. They searched the walls and people around the room more carefully to find places where media might be hiding. They left the classroom looking at the world around them with new eyes. The first message they found was that media is everywhere; that class ended and they were just a bit more aware of the water.

### **21st Century Learners**

My students have inherited a world outside the classroom that differs greatly from the one that their parents experienced as teenagers: their future must respond to the unsettling

fluctuations in our financial-markets, the rapid disappearance of production-based jobs, and the critical environmental issues we face as a country and planet. Future success outside of the classroom will require a specific type of knowledge base and abilities. Twenty-first century students must develop highly specialized problem-solving and critical thinking skills to address the accelerated growth of technology and the increasingly specialized work that needs to be done in the contemporary work force. First, they must be able to access information stored from both their own life experiences and the large stores of digital information all around them. Berlo (1975) portends, “it no longer is *possible* to store within the human brain all of the information that a human needs” because “we are *obsolete* as a memory bank” (p.8). My seventh graders will not spend their late nights, as I did, memorizing the states and capitals or the first forty U.S. Presidents, for they have search engines and online resources that make those activities seem quaint and ineffectual. Instead, my students will be repeatedly called upon to cull through scores of online resources to find and engage germane information from reputable sources with care.

The Media Literacy Kit (2008) from the Center for Media Literacy (CML) defines access as the ability to “recognize and understand a rich vocabulary of words, symbols and techniques of communication... Develop strategies for locating information from a wide variety of sources” and “Select an assortment of types of information relevant to the purpose of a task”(p.60). Second, students must be able to analyze the information that they find. One major downside to having the access to the World Wide Web and its concomitant information czars—like *Google, AskJeeves, Wikipedia, etc.*, remains the abundance of inaccurate, incomplete, or biased information left unchecked throughout. As public access to this digital flow of information expands in spaces like blogs, wiki spaces, podcasts and other media outlets, the ability of any

centralized entity to completely maintain the highest quality of information becomes increasingly compromised. Therefore, students must learn how to ask pertinent questions of the information that they receive—who created this message, what is its purpose, who is its audience? The CML says that the “When people *analyze* messages, they are able to examine the design of the message’s form, structure and sequence. They can make use of artistic, literary, social, political and economic concepts to understand the context in which the message occurs” (ibid). This analysis serves as the basis of critical thinking that my students use to identify and interact with the messages found in the media. After students master the skills that will allow them to access media freely and analyze it, the next logical step is to develop the tools to evaluate a source for its relevance, quality, and exactitude. This task taps into the life experiences and world views of the students as they compare and contrast what they know of the content and structure of different messages from varied sources. The Center of Media Literacy says this endeavor also includes the ability to “Judge the value of a message based on one’s ethical, religious or democratic principles...” to “...messages of varying complexity and content” (p. 61). The final two aspects of learning for the twenty-first century student truly complement one another: the ability to create and engage the messages that exist in the media goes hand in hand. Collaborative efforts to synthesize previously obtained knowledge and experiences with innovative end products—such as projects, portfolios, etc.— has a virtually unlimited number of applications inside and outside of the classroom. The CML states that this process asks students to “create and select images effectively to achieve various goals...Use technologies of communication in the construction of messages” and “Interact responsibly and ethically...” (ibid).

Serious tension exists, however, between the criticality I seek from my students within this course and the rhetoric used in the corporately sponsored initiatives I cite for twenty-first century learning. On one hand, I challenge my students to question the underlying social, economic, and cultural tenets found in media messages, and on the other I seemingly endorse a capitalist agenda that strives to perpetuate corporate power and influence. To be sure, the companies that support *The Partnership for 21st Century Skills* advocate for the incorporation of critical thinking skills as a way to make investments in their own futures and ensure an increasingly efficient workforce that doubles as contented consumers. I attempt to negotiate these two distinct and incongruous notions of critical thinking, by encouraging my students to simultaneously interrogate the cogs of capitalism embedded within media messages and attend to their marketability within today's turbulent economy. Truthfully, there are no neat resolutions to this conflict and throughout this project I simply embrace the messiness.

As the increase of critical thinking skills and technology use becomes part of a larger push to prepare students for the world they will inherit as adults, the way that students learn and teachers instruct has changed. Time and energy in the classroom has been shifted to address the specific skills and knowledge that students will need to lead successful and productive lives outside of the educational sphere and their educational experiences have become more relevant in both content and context to their future endeavors as workers. They are encouraged to integrate the expansion of technology skills, model creative problem solving, and develop critical thinking. A report compiled by an organization called *The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills* says specifically, "People need to know more than core subjects. They need to know how to use their knowledge and skills—by thinking critically, applying knowledge to new situations, analyzing information, comprehending new ideas, communicating,

collaborating, solving problems, making decisions...updating their knowledge and skills continually and independently” (p. 11). Even the form of information has metamorphosed in today’s society; Jolls and Thoman (2004) typify this 21<sup>st</sup> century world by saying, “Today, information about the world around us comes to us not only by words on a piece of paper but more and more through powerful images and sounds of our multi-media culture...Media no longer just shape our culture...they ARE our culture” (p.1). They go on to characterize the new type of learning that must occur in this new era,

This explosion in information has presented a major challenge to the world of formal education. For centuries, schooling has been designed to make sure students learned facts about the world—which they proved they knew by correctly answering questions on tests. But such a system is no longer relevant when the most up-to-date facts are available at the touch of a button. What students need today is to learn how to find what they need to know when they need to know it, from the best sources available—and to have the higher order thinking skills to analyze and evaluate whether the information they find is useful for what they want to know. (p. 9)

As a computer science teacher, this means a shift in my classroom role from the keeper of information to that of a facilitator of learning for the students. My digitally native students, born into the constantly updating world of ipods, iphones, and Mac books, often have a solid technical knowledge-base, but not an overall understanding of how critical thinking, ethical technology use, and efficient tech integration come into play. Their technology skills need to be paired with guidance in a safe and respectful learning environment that values student knowledge and contributions equally in order to set up an engaging, relevant, student-centered classroom experience. In order to establish an environment conducive to the free idea exchange of students, the amount of trust and interdependence between my students and me must be very high. This requires that I work hard to let go of the notion of teaching that I

encountered as a younger pupil and rethink the ostensible infallibility of the teacher figure. This 21<sup>st</sup> century approach to students and teaching insists that there be moments when I, as the teacher, move out of the way and allow the students to be sources of knowledge.

### **Media Literacy: in Theory**

Media literacy gets used as an umbrella term that encompasses a multitude of endeavors. It appears often in contemporary literature and is co-opted as a buzzword for trendy business and education programs just as frequently. Media literacy, according to Jolls and Thoman (2008) is a long-term curriculum that integrates traditionally isolated core subjects and media with contemporary tools, relevant context, and hands-on processes (p. 77). It “meets the needs of students to be wise consumers of media, managers of information, responsible producers of their ideas using the powerful multimedia tools that actively participate in a global media culture” (ibid). It is this interconnection of the technology, context, and process that enhances the learning of students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and helps them draw useful parallels between their lives inside and outside the classroom and school. The Center for Media Literacy (2004) confirms,

First, the focus of media literacy is on *process* rather than *content*. The goal of media literacy is not to memorize facts about media or even be able to make a video or design a PowerPoint. Rather the goal is to explore questions that arise when one engages critically with a mediated message – print or electronic. It involves posing problems that exercise higher order thinking skills – learning how to identify key concepts, how to make connections between multiple ideas, how to ask pertinent questions, identify fallacies, formulate a response. (p. 5)

The key to achieving this goal of integration rests heavily on what the CML calls the “inquiry process.” The teacher, in the new role of facilitator, helps students train their brains for critical

thinking by asking a series of questions. These questions, which are grouped in their *Media Lit Kit* framework, ultimately help teach students how to learn in many different situations.

In a tremendous effort to help teachers begin a media literacy program with their own students, the Center for Media Literacy (CML) created and shared their *Media Lit Kit* curriculum, an easy to use, but sophisticated series of media literacy lesson plans and classroom activities. The framework of this highly adaptable kit begins with five *Core Concepts* that can be used with students of any age to perform critical analysis of media:

- 1) All media messages are constructed.
- 2) Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
- 3) Different people experience the same media message differently.
- 4) Media have embedded values and points of view.
- 5) Media messages are constructed to gain profit and/or power. (p. 47)

It also has five corresponding questions that serve to launch the investigation of each *Core Concepts*. The following five questions minimize the academic jargon and make beginning a media literacy lesson as simple as asking a question:

- 1) Who created this message?
- 2) What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
- 3) How might different people understand this message differently from me?
- 4) What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented in—or omitted from—this message?
- 5) Why is this message being sent ? (ibid)

The curriculum flows sequentially from the first concept and question pair to the next and so on, but each concept and question can also stand alone as its own media literacy unit if so desired.

The first concept (*All media messages are constructed*) and question (*Who created this message?* ) begins a discussion of authorship, and ultimately it works to denaturalize the media

message and its cultural products by identifying the media maker(s). By pulling back the curtain and showing the ins-and-outs of the creation process, it is possible to demystify media and its messages. It becomes clear, upon peeking behind the scenes in this way, that many other ideas and plans get rejected in the process of making the end product. The investigation of media, when seen in this light, makes it possible to better understand the impact that it has on its audiences.

The second *Core Concept*, *Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules*, and question, *What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?*, address the format of media or the specific elements that make media of different types unique: whether it is the happy ending in a fairy-tale story, or the scariest scene in a horror movie, there exists a seamless combination of music, lighting, camera angle, composition, body language, facial expression, dialogue and other techniques that work together to produce the overall effect. It is this complex set of culturally accepted combinations that constitutes its visual language. Many times the combination seems familiar enough to achieve its intended emotional response from the audience, but opaque enough to elude being broken down into its individual components at first glance.

The third concept-question pair (*Different people experience the same media message differently and How might different people understand this message differently from me?*) centers on audience: both the ways that media messages target their audiences and the ways that audiences receive media messages. Jolls and Thoman (2004) say that this notion of audience, “examines how *who we are* influences *how we understand* or respond to a media text. Each audience member brings to each media text a unique set of life experiences (age,

gender, education, cultural upbringing, etc.) which, when applied to the text – or combined with the text – create unique interpretations” (pp. 7-8).

The fourth *Core Concept, Media have embedded values and points of view*, and accompanying question, *What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in or omitted from this message?*, analyze the content of media messages. It has an intimate relationship to the first concept and question as the decisions made in the creation of media inevitably represent (or omit) a particular worldview, understanding of reality, and belief system. If the same perspective continually gets chosen for the end product, while others consistently get excluded, then limited and limiting patterns develop within the media that have significant effects on the audience.

The final focus of purpose comes from the fifth concept, *Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power*, and question, *Why is this message being sent?* The purpose of an image remains central to understanding any media message. While the purposes—to sell a product, to endorse an idea, or promote a way of life—vary in media, knowing these motivating factors helps the audience to have a more developed understanding of the messages than they would otherwise. However, it is important to note that even though most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power, they are not inherently nefarious or biased.

### **Media Literacy: in Practice**

In order to complete this action research project, I met with several administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders of my medium-sized private school and explained that I was interested in developing a media literacy program with my computer science class. After outlining the ways that this project lined up with our school’s goal to integrate the principles of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning for our students, I received full support by the administration and creative

license to incorporate a media literacy curriculum into my seventh grade computer science class. Due to fortuitous timing, this course was approved soon after the launch of our school's One-to-One Lap Top Program, which equipped all 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade students with a Mac Book and attending software. Our school had also recently equipped each classroom with an interactive Smart Board.

The fortunate influx of access to technology made many impending logistical issues disappear before I had even anticipated them. The course took place in my math classroom and the seventh grade students brought themselves and their materials to me two times a week. The design of the curriculum had to fit within the nine-week quarter and lend itself to the kind of flexibility that an action research curriculum and project required. The *Media Lit Kit* served as a helpful starting point for my iteration of this course. Beginning with my research questions and the foundational *Core Concepts*, I thought about ways to blend the pedagogy of inquiry, twenty-first century teaching techniques, and innovative content into a successful course. Though the kit was an excellent beginning point, I knew that I needed to make adjustments to the curriculum, lesson plans, activities, and assessments throughout the course; the success of this class depended on being responsive to issues that arose unexpectedly.

The *Media Lit Kit* offered twenty-five lessons, five for each of the five of the *Core Concepts* and question pairs. The lessons, as a whole, covered five major topics: basic communication and skills, news, advertisement, entertainment, and miscellaneous. I selected seven of those twenty-five lessons to use during the course because of the limited amount of face time we would have in the nine-week quarter: our class would only meet for 45 to 50 minutes approximately fifteen times (see Appendix B). The seven lessons I initially chose were modified during the course of this study as my research questions dictated. I prepared to

investigate first the media messages my students found in images published for a teenage audience and then how they interacted with the messages found within these popular culture images. With these questions in mind, I began to think of the best way to set up the class. I began with assumptions, some of which would later be challenged and alter the way the course was to proceed. First, I assumed that my students would give full effort in class because they were interested in popular culture, that they would be willing to bring their interest into the classroom in a constructive way, that they would be as enthused about the deconstruction of popular culture as the consumption of it, that they would find and be willing to share messages in the media, and that they would be willing to talk openly and honestly in a co-ed classroom about those messages.

As the course progressed, I found that my assumptions were not completely accurate and I had to make adjustments to the way that I was approaching the class and the project. Firstly, I assumed that most, if not all, of the students would gladly give high effort in this class because the content was connected to the media. I anticipated that the relevance of media to their real lives would make the work like play. While my expectations were met by some of my more conscientious students, all did not meet them. The low effort by some students, consequently, had direct impact on both my first and second research questions, for I could not study the messages that my students noticed in media or the interactions that had with those messages if they were not taking the time or effort to notice them. Since I was not getting the kind of feedback that I needed from my students about the messages they encountered in the media text, I had to make some changes. I eventually reduced the workload: I lowered the number of lessons to five and the media-tech projects to four, and made one of the journal entries extra credit (see Appendix B). Ultimately, the reduction in the amount of work expected

from the students addressed the issues of effort and increased the quality of their submissions. Several of my most dedicated students admitted that the decreased workload helped them better engage with the media texts; so instead of getting journals that looked as though they had been written five minutes prior to class, I began to receive journals that demonstrated time, energy, effort, and insight.

My assumption about students bringing their interest in popular culture into the classroom turned out to be more accurate than I realized. On more than one occasion, I found that while I was in the front of the room explaining the deconstruction of media, many of my students were completely distracted. While I was used to the occasional post-lunch daydreaming that my sixth graders fell prey to, I was not anticipating what I witnessed with my seventh graders. They were not listening to my technical explanations, they were instead perusing the very magazines that I had asked them to bring to class! Though the irony in this situation was not lost on me, it served as another seminal moment in my project. As I addressed the class management issue on autopilot, I was struck by the realization of yet another assumption I had made: interest in media or the technical aspects of it outside of the classroom does not imply an interest in media literacy inside the classroom. Thankfully, this realization became a nonissue after I addressed the failing on my part to present the material in an interactive way. For in my haste to share information about media literacy with my students, I found myself resorting back to default classroom behavior. I became the talking head in front of the classroom with wordy Keynote slides and dim lighting; mercifully, my students by their inattention quickly let me know that I was not meeting their needs. I was effectively sabotaging my pursuit of my second research question, because I was not allowing the students to interact with the media messages that they found. The way that I was executing the curriculum--

dominating the class discussion with lecture, using presentations with too much text, and placing myself in the role as the sole source of information--was contrary to my initial plan and counterproductive to my aims. In response, I modified the class to address this issue in three ways: I eliminated extraneous text and talking from my presentations, incorporated more images in the few critical presentations that had to be made, and included more hands-on activities to help the students understand media literacy. A concrete example of these changes happened during our next lesson about the emotional effects of camera angle, composition, and lighting. In this lesson, I briefly showed the students visual examples directly from the media, and then I gave them digital cameras, flash lights, and a few guiding instructions so that they could explore the ways that different permutations of camera angle, composition, and lighting effected their own emotions. We then completed the circle by applying their feelings to other media examples outside the classroom. The change to a more interactive exploration of media proved to be a success and our class discussions were more fruitful than before.

The pedagogical adaptation to this course that had the most impact on both research questions and the quality of my findings was the creation of the final lesson on modified media images and its partner media-tech project called: "I Can Do That!: Creating Your Own Magazine Cover." These two additions to the curriculum served to encapsulate the needs of the twenty-first century learner, utilize the media literacy concepts, and integrate technology into a real-world simulation. This culminating activity demanded that students demonstrate an understanding of both the media literacy concepts and the computer science skills we had covered over the nine weeks. Students were encouraged to use any of the techniques and equipment from the course to create a magazine cover that matched their own personalities. By taking on the role of the creator, my students were able to see first-hand how the decision

processes in media creation worked and demonstrate the ways that they were interacting with media and its messages. They reveled at having creative license, bristled over impending deadlines, and agonized over the details, from choosing color schemes and designing layouts to customizing overall themes and editing specific content. The students investigated media through their own action and experienced the kinds of emotions and situations that might very well have created their favorite popular culture magazines.

As the students stretched to really invest themselves into the process: they began to answer the first research question (What media messages do my students find in images published for a teenage audience?) and recognize the patterns that occurred in other magazines, billboards, and media in general. The students used the Photoshop programs to reproduce and thereby demystify the modification effects that they noticed in many media images. They mastered the art of lightening photographs, brightening eye color, and even whitening teeth and eyes. While some students found ways to replicate the subtle alterations from pop culture, others used the opportunity to create their own version of overt, extremely modified images. Their modifications, however, did not adhere to the standardized notions of mainstream media: instead of striving towards the generally accepted standards of perfection, these students gave themselves extra eyes or non-human appendages. It should be noted, here, that students were also given the option to leave images for the cover of their magazines unaltered and some students also took that option to heart.

Other students developed complex and ambivalent interactions with photoshopped images in the media. When asked how she feels about mainstream magazines when compared to the ones we created in class, Jasmin states, "I would like to see these people [retouched models], but I also would not. They make me self-conscious, but they make me want to be like

them...which makes me have something to look forward to...even though that will probably never happen.” By acknowledging the conflicting desires she found in these magazine covers, Jasmin simultaneously offered evidence for my second research question (How do students interact with the messages found within these popular culture images?) and changed the way I had been approaching this research project and what I had been expecting to find. While I surely expected some students to decide, for varying reasons, that the mainstream media messages they found were innocuous or “just for entertainment,” I had not anticipated having a student recognize the negative aspects of media manipulations, acknowledge the effects it had on her self-confidence, yet simultaneously look to it as a goal, albeit impossible, for which to strive. The way that Jasmin engaged with the media messages that she found about girlhood was complicated and messy to me, but it made sense for her. Jasmin was not alone in her nimble negotiations with these messages. Her classmate Tiffany also wrote, “I would like to see more people like that [un-retouched images] because it would put more reality in the media but also I think it is fun to think about there are people actually like that and it is a fantasy sort of. Especially to a girl who loves to see the glitz and glam of Hollywood.”

### CHAPTER 3

#### ***“I CAN DO THAT!”: Letting Students Create Their Own Magazine Cover***

*I would like to see more magazines that are about everyday life, but fun to read, and not about famous people being arrested and having kids named after fruits and plants.*

*--Leslie*

*Seventh grade student*

The desks are scattered casually about the same math-turned-computer-science classroom but the feel in this space has changed drastically from the first day of class. Almost all of my students have made their way to their seats, where they are the picture of multitasking: they effortlessly carry on animated conversations with their neighbors about the new techniques they used in their last assignment, busily submit the electronic version of said project to the class drop-box, proudly share screenshots of their masterpieces with classmates, and steadily ready themselves for the next class discussion. Long gone is the shyness of that first class meeting, with its awkwardness that made class discussion slow and stilted; my students seem comfortable now with this class, with each other, with this business of Media Literacy, and with me. I sit at my L-shaped desk in the back left corner of the room and stand to ask them about their latest assignment just as the second bell rings. The room moves from a low hum to a hotbed of enthusiasm as they all eagerly replay the highlights and lament the setbacks of their project experience—they voice their excitement about the power and control they felt, express their frustration at the amount of time it took to “get it just right,” and share the unanticipated nuance that they found within this process of creation. A lull in the buzz comes over the room and several female students began to speak again at the same time; they

both pause briefly to let the other speak, slightly embarrassed for this eager stumble but determined to be heard, when one of them continues on to finish her thoughts, “I learned that it is a lot easier to convince people than I thought. If you act like you are important or a doctor or something and you want to sell the product, its easier to get people listening because they believe you when you say to buy it.” Other students quickly chime in with their own accounts, detailing not only the persuasive techniques they encountered within their marketing project but also in their own interactions with other media outside of class. Our discussion focuses on the ways that advertisers try to convince their audience of an alternate reality where highly desirable lifestyles can be attained through the purchase of the “right” products or services. In this alternate reality people are always more-than-adequately wealthy, unflappably happy, and flawlessly beautiful. Many of the students voice their own opinions about the viability of these lifestyles; Candice says that advertisers, “make skin look smoother, lips look fuller, or make eyes look brighter and prettier. They do this because they want you to think that you will look like that if you use their product.” Tiffany agrees with desirability of the ideal bodies and lifestyles presented in the media saying, “...it is human nature when you see something that looks better than you, you want to look that good” but calls into question its attainability. She says, “It is impossible to look the way some people change these images.” Insights like this and others set the stage for our conversations about our next topic in class; for today we begin our discussion about Photoshop, modified images, and their effects on teen audiences.

To start this conversation, my students and I revisit the metaphor that began this class: Do fish—read people in contemporary U.S. society, notice the water—read ubiquitous placement of media throughout everyday life? As we progressed through our nine-week computer science course, I began to notice the students demonstrate a more sophisticated

understanding of both the fish and the water in our discussions; they speak of themselves as teenaged fish swimming within and among the adult world of media. This media water-world, replete with its persuasive techniques scattered about like brightly colored fishing lures, vies to attract and hold their attention. As the students did not see the ads as necessarily dangerous, the fish in this metaphor might be likened to those in a “catch-and-release” facility.

### **Ads...Ads... Everywhere!**

Over the course of this class, students have changed the way that they interact with advertisements. For example, at the start of class many of my students were mostly unaware of the complex ways that advertisements work; they also seemed unconscious of many of the messages in those advertisements. Though they could certainly recognize brands, remember their favorites, and identify those that did not appeal to them, they still did not fully recognize the constructed nature of ads and the major role ads play in deciding what is normal, desirable, or worthwhile. During the course of the class, however, the students—both in class and in their journal assignments—began to discuss and understand advertisements as specifically constructed to elicit particular actions and reactions from very specific, target audiences. They also began to understand how they were that niche market for many advertisers. We talked about the ways that advertisements find and address niche markets using identity traits—like age, gender, and socioeconomic status, are targeted and linked to consumerism. To be sure, there were a few students who began this course with a very sophisticated understanding of the ad industry. Other themes emerged from students’ journal entries indicating a growing awareness of some of complex cultural forces at work within these images. Students identified links between the push to purchase products or services and the desire to attain cultural beauty

standards; they evaluated the effectiveness of different persuasive techniques; and they analyzed the patterns and effects of modified images from the media on themselves.

I chose to use advertisements as the source of our investigation of modified images because their very nature and purpose make them an ideal place to recognize and examine the media messages that can be more latent in other outlets. Advertisements work to communicate many varied messages in a limited amount of time and space, which require them to be steeped with a cultural-shorthand that the students can access—a societal crib sheet that reinforces our contemporary societal mores with potent proliferation. Kilbourne (1994) references this influence saying, “More and more people are taking advertising seriously. They are realizing that the \$130 billion advertising industry is a powerful educational force in America. The average American is exposed to over 1500 ads every day...” (p. 395). This class provided a space for my students to think critically about the ad industry in a timely and meaningful way.

#### **Girl Fish, Boy Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish: A Gendered Look at Advertisement**

As I read through the journals that my students submitted over the course of the class, I found that the responses of my female students were very descriptive about the ways that advertisements tried to make them feel. They talked about the ways that the modified images affected their relationships between and among their peers of both genders. The male students, however, often kept the information more general. They made observations about themselves as target audiences or comments about how the media might mislead, but did not demonstrate an internalized connection with the persuasive techniques. They talked about being targeted by ads that utilized crude humor, famous athletes, or products that they desired—like sports equipment, cell phones, ipods, or videogames. They also admitted that when they

liked an item, the ad was superfluous. Bryan talks specifically about the type of ads that he is targeted by and what they want him to see, "From humorous commercials like the Budweiser commercial on cutting the cheese, to eye popping billboards like a Longhorn Steakhouse billboard when they really have longhorns, they are catching your attention and that is what the advertisers want," and Mark talks about what they want him to do; he says, "I am a target audience for products like Gatorade, PowerAde, or Vitamin Water because we watch sports shows that have commercials where famous athletes are saying how much they love one of these drinks and this draws us toward them." His female classmate Denise talks about the way that advertisers try to get her to feel. She says, "they [advertisers] want us to get stuff that they say would make us beautiful or feel great about our body like perfume, but they are also trying to make people at our age think that we need stuff...". Janet says that the perfect looking images from ads "have a negative effect on people because it causes them to look at themselves in a negative way. They see the perfect person in the picture and compare it to the average person and themselves causing them to want to change the way they look."

Another gendered difference that my students found was the overwhelming number of beauty products targeted at teenage girls and an equally concentrated number of sports advertising targeted at boys. There was crossover, acne and hygiene products aimed at boys and sports gear pitched to girls, but those ads were not in the majority. To be sure, there are also advertisements for some beauty products like acne care specifically targeted at boys as well, but the predominate messages designated girls as the ones most invested in bodily appearance. As the competition for adolescent girl dollars continues to grow, ads continue to capitalize on what many perceive as adolescent anxiety: the teenage search for confidence and belonging serves as a powerful motivator to buy. Combined with increased ingenuity in product

placement in other areas of the media, the messages in advertisements directed towards girls are very clear. Kilbourne (1994) and Douglas (1994) outline this crisis of confidence. Kilbourne says, "The tyranny of the ideal image makes almost all of us feel inferior. An internal voice rages at us: 'You are fat. You are ugly. Your thighs are like jelly. You have cellulite. You have pimples. You have vaginal odor. Your hair is drab. Your skin is dry.' We are taught to hate our bodies, and thus learn to hate our selves" (p. 396). My students also notice how advertisers use these messages to peddle products. They comment on the pairing of product slogans and images of attractive models to tap into these feelings of insecurity and anxiety. They also notice how these advertisements use modified images with products like mascara that quadruples lash length, mineral make-up that airbrushes away blemishes, and celebrity-endorsed clothing items that hide, lift, separate, and reshape. As the ads show photo-shopped images of flawless models on one hand, they promise increased social status through appearance, or alterations of appearance on the other.

These ads use heterosexuality to further validate the pursuit of social status. Many advertisers implant opposite gendered models into advertisements in situations that mimic courtship and/or successful, heterosexual romance. While my students did not name it as such, they were able to recognize the practice of couching products that claim to make users more desirable, beautiful, and sophisticated within this heterosexual narrative serves to reinforce how proper consumption can create and sustain heterosexual relationships. Though my students would be mortified to know it, I often see both male and female students spending significant time during their school day, and even more of their out of school time I imagine, fretting about how they are supposed to be around the opposite gender. Advertisers use this self-consciousness as another way to effectively target its audience. As a side-effect, it further

entrenches notions of heteronormativity by assuming that girls are trying to catch the eye of a male counterpart; they use this promise of finding and keeping a really “cute” boyfriend, as another dangling lure for their adolescent girl audience. Heteronormativity, a term coined by Michael Warner in his work *Fear of a Queer Planet* and based on Adrienne Rich’s “compulsory heterosexuality,” can be found in images of attractive males that display approval of either the product in question or a woman who has purchased said product. Warner (1997) says:

...so much privilege lies in heterosexual culture’s exclusive ability to interpret itself as society. Het culture thinks of itself as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of inter-gender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn’t exist. Materialist thinking about society has in many cases reinforced these tendencies, inherent in heterosexual ideology, toward a totalized view of the social. (p. xxi)

Warner asserts that heteronormativity, or normative heterosexuality, “thinks of itself as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of intergender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn’t exist” (p. xxi). Some of my female students discuss the ways that advertisement messages seem to speak to them and play on their eagerness to be considered attractive to the “right guy”; they all center around a similar and limited narrative that loosely reads like this: you are a girl, you are good even if inadequate, we can help you attain physical or social “improvement” that will make you the center of male attention; all you have to do is purchase the advertised product. Tabitha speaks directly to the use of the opposite sex to attract her attention, she writes that advertisers, “like to get us girls to buy their product usually by having guys” in the ad. Other students talk about the desire to fit in and its resulting compulsion to buy. Candice writes, “You might see a teenage model wearing an amazing shirt that makes her

look beautiful. You think that the shirt will make you look beautiful too, so you have to buy it.” Julie simply states “we are young and want to fit in.”

While Tabitha, Candice and Leslie offer commentary on the persuasive techniques of the ads, Susie generalizes about how advertisements seek to work on girls at large by saying that advertisements try “to make the reader think that if they use this product they too can look like the model in this ad.” Denise calls the advertising companies out on their tactics by claiming defiantly, “Many advertisers think that since we are young or sometimes not the smartest, that they can just fool us into thinking that we need the product and that we need this to do well in our teenage years.” She not only names the strategies that advertisers are using to attract her attention, but implies that this process seeks to take advantage of young people, young girls specifically. Travis offers a male perspective and connects Denise’s idea to yet another strategy employed by advertisers and their photographers: the manipulation of models and celebrities in ad images. He says, “photographers modify celebrities and super models’ images to make them look like what people want but can’t obtain so they might buy their products because it says it will make you look like that super model.” These students identify complex interrelationships between advertisers, consumerism, the beauty ideal, and image manipulation. They also exhibit different responses to these advertising industry strategies. Some students see themselves as targets of the advertisers’ unfulfilled promises latent within the ads, while others talk back to the advertisers saying that they do not necessarily believe their promises of physical or social “improvement.”

### **Unanticipated Treasures of the Deep**

One of the most surprising findings from this project came when I analyzed the journal responses of my male students. In their journals, I found that there was a significant difference

in the way that they interacted with media than the ways that their female counterparts interacted with media messages. As I examined their work, I found that most of the journal responses from my male students shied away from the topic of body image. Generally, they offered very little on the ways that they, as boys, were specifically targeted as audiences of advertisements. In general, my male students seemed content to simply acknowledge that they were enticed by advertisers to buy, but they seemed to keep issues of body image “at arms’ length.” They seemed to be able to externalize the media in a way that my female students did not. For instance, Leslie explains the ways that she and other girls internalize the messages that advertisers use to hail them. She says, “The advertisers usually target me as a teenaged girl; they use make-up commercial with pretty girls saying if you use this you’ll be pretty too, and girls my age usually are self-conscious about looks so if it says it makes you prettier we can’t wait to try it.” My male students do not refer to themselves in the same way that their female counterparts do; they do not group themselves as the collective “teenaged boys.” Instead, they talk about the ways that they interacted individually with the media. One possible explanation points to the ways that they are socialized; perhaps they consider it too “girly” to be self-conscious and vulnerable in that way to advertisers. Observations of my male students revealed similar trends; as a group they showed a consistent reticence to share in class about issues of body image. While the girls shyly related stories about ways that they, their friends, or their family members, struggled or failed to attain the ideals portrayed in the media, the boys in the class behaved as though body images were a uniquely girl-related issue. As a result, the girls in the class, seemed to form connections to each other around these issues over the course of the class that the boys did not. It seemed as if their shared experiences had bonded them.

While they did not bond around issues of body image, many of the male students, however, seemed to bond around a shared classroom experience. For instance, the need arose throughout class to use images that illustrated particular media literacy concepts and skills; and in at least a couple of them, the subject of the images were typical, contemporary images of a less than modestly groomed female figure. Though certainly still appropriate for class, the images caused quite a stir for the boys. Even after redirecting from me, the boys responded with low whispers and uncomfortable laughter. To address this more globally, reminded the boys specifically and the whole class generally that these images were far more tame than those they routinely see on billboards or the cover of their favorite magazines; and that settled the issue. The implications of these gendered difference within the class led me to rethink my approach to the class. Interestingly, I began to think that if the class were single-gendered, I might have found a different set of interactions from my male students. Questions for future classes might include: How do my male students contribute differently during class discussions and journaling if they were only among their male peers? As it stands, they focused instead on the patterns of image manipulation they found in media.

### **Digital Images and Digital Magic**

The advent of the digital camera did not begin image altering, but it has made the process of retouching images much easier to perform and much more difficult to recognize. As an introduction to the idea of digital retouching and the software Adobe Photoshop, my students and I viewed various digital images that had been either retouched or constructed digitally. We saw subtly altered photographs of everyday citizens and models, as well as outrageously morphed Frankenstein photos of well-known celebrities. After spending the better part of the class figuring out which features belonged to which Hollywood Star, we

finished up class by visiting the website of a high profile graphic artist, Amy Dresser, whose livelihood centers on altering images for celebrities like Brittany Spears, Jessica Alba, and lil' Wayne; corporations like Nintendo, Best Buy, and Secret; and television shows like *America's Next Top Model*, *Mad TV*, and *Legally Blond*. The website's rollover tool allowed the students to see the images before and after being photo-shopped in real time. This feature helped facilitate our investigation of digitally altered images, in addition to providing great entertainment for the class. Our online experience helped us recognize print images that had been lightened, cropped, lengthened, darkened, blurred, sharpened or otherwise manipulated. As a follow-up activity, I asked students to journal about the patterns they noticed in the modified images around them and to think about the kinds of messages, if any, exposure to these kinds of images might have on them, their friends, or their family. The insights they shared with me were both rich and varied.

The first thing that my students discovered about ads and other media images was the overwhelming number of them that appear everywhere in our contemporary society. The first class project asked students to predict the percentage of pages in a magazine that would have ads on them and their estimates were conservative: as low as nineteen percent. As they worked through that first project, however, those numbers were found to be a severe underestimation; there were instances in some magazines that included nearly ninety-nine percent advertisements. The sheer number of advertisement images in the environment around them became more apparent and students began to connect the high saturation of advertising and photo-shopped images in printed media to images in other media outlets like television shows and movies. One student asked during our class discussion, "Can they do these kinds of photo-shop things, in movies?" and a classmate answered before I could

respond, “Yea, they can. Superman’s eyes in the movie *Superman Returns* are really, really blue, but the actor playing him in the movie has brown eyes!” The realization that image modifications were not limited to still photos reverberated throughout that class and for the rest of the quarter students began to assume that all images, everywhere, were altered in some way. Julie writes, “almost all images get digitally altered in some way, shape, or form” and that “In this modern day and age, it is definitely a lot harder to decipher which images have been digitally altered and which ones haven’t.” Janet echoes her classmates’ sentiments, saying, “Doing this project made me realize that more than half the time we look at images that aren’t even real.”

In addition to realizing that most images get changed as part of contemporary processing, my students also noticed patterns in the ways that these images were being modified and how they were being deployed. Here students characterized images as having blemish-free and pore-less models with perfect hair, thin bodies, full lips, and bright eyes; the models were often female and were generally bereft of many “normal” human qualities: photographed in extreme lighting and wearing flawlessly tailored clothing. These images, with their perfected physical appearances, looked out to the audience from the glossy pages of their magazines, the high-definition of plasma television sets, and the Hollywood spotlight of blockbuster movie screens and beckoned the students to shop, not only for particular products, but for idealized lifestyles as well. Candice observed astutely, “Advertisers will make skin look smoother, lips look fuller, or make eyes look brighter and prettier. They do this because they want you to think that you will look like that if you use their product.” She then goes on to make a connection to how these image manipulations work to persuade consumers. She says, “Advertising is merely an illusion trying to make the image seem perfect to catch your attention.”

Other students talked about the effects that modified images have on them and their teenage peers. Celeste explains, "In the media, almost all of the pictures you see have been modified. The media wants you to believe that is how the picture really looks, but the truth is no one looks like that. This affects people all over the world. Teenagers start to think that is how they need to look." Her peers agree with her; Leslie shares a similar frustration in her journal; saying, "Everybody on the magazines and in the magazines are perfect and it makes you (the reader) feel ugly and feel like you need to look like that and that what you see on the magazines are normal life." One of the implications of being constantly bombarded by these messages in the media is that my students sometimes feel overwhelmed by feelings of ineptitude. In this classroom, my students felt as though they could confide the feelings of inadequacy they sometimes experience when comparing themselves to the idealized, if manipulated, images in the media. Some students speak candidly about the side effects for girls specifically; Julie shares:

One of the biggest side effects is that because the model/celebrity on the image looks "thin" for example, that if someone isn't *that* thin, than that they are "fat", which can lower their self-esteem and make them extremely upset with themselves. Sometimes teen girls are so obsessed with looking like people in the images that they see, on T.V. or in a magazine, that they end up hurting or even killing themselves because they don't look the right way or because they get teased for not looking that way.

In her journal Brandy doubts whether most girls outside of class see through the digital alterations to the constructed nature of the images, she says, "Sometimes teenage girls aren't aware that the photographs in fashion magazines are all airbrushed. This causes their self-esteem to drop because they don't think they can look like an unrealistic image of a model." The place of this class, for some students, has been a way to be "aware" on a very concrete level that the images they see are constructed for very specific purposes. Cynthia insists that

teenage girls resist the messages in these images. She asserts that while “...these teenage girls look at these photo-shopped ladies and ask themselves why they can’t be like them, they don’t understand that the stars don’t really look like this. They don’t need to starve themselves to look like this because no one really does.” While Susie sums up the class and the whole of advertisement, techniques of persuasion, digital image changing, and their synergistic effects by saying quite eloquently that:

I think a lot of people are misled by the modified images. A lot of people think that the way the people look in the image is the way that they look in real life. Some people even develop sicknesses like anorexia and bulimia because they see all the stick thin models in magazines, and can’t understand why they don’t look like them. These modified images can also lure somebody in to buying a product. For example, for make-up commercials the models are always air brushed so that they don’t have any blemishes or make-up showing. Many women believe that if they buy this product they too can look like the model. The fact is though, the model doesn’t even look like that, and blemishes and imperfections are just part of being human.

The culminating activity of this nine-week course was an individual project that asked students to use the media literacy skills and knowledge of media messages that they accumulated over the quarter to create their own fictional magazine cover. I encouraged students to draw from any aspect of their own lives for the content of the magazine cover and use any and all of the technology available to them during the class for the format: all equipment like digital cameras, scanners, and software like Keynote and Photoshop would be provided. In producing a cover that represented their own specific interests, I hoped that the students would reveal ways that they were engaging--reinforcing, mimicking, or resisting--the media messages we had encountered throughout the term. The projects my students completed were included in a journal component that allowed them to share the back-story of their finished products. They were to include explanations of the font choices, layout, and

content of their magazine cover. In addition to these descriptions, students were asked to share their thoughts about their magazine cover, and answer the following journal question: Would you like to see more magazines like your own in the media? Explain why.

The general themes that I found in the projects were insightful and unique. Some of the students really took this as an opportunity to celebrate aspects of their teenage lives that they rarely see tailored to them in mainstream outlets. They took this chance to talk back to the media messages that they had found all around them. To be sure, there were a lot of magazine covers that focused on dating, fashion, celebrities, and gossip, but many others that focused on the students' unique families, their friends, their music, and their extra curricular activities. In this project, the students really brought their outside lives into the classroom in a way that was authentic and refreshing. On the day that we were to do our presentation, students excitedly vied for a turn in sharing their own creations. There was a great sense of pride and accomplishment as the students showed off their technology skill, mastered tricks of the trade, and the activities and aspects of their "out of school" lives that bring them self-confidence and satisfaction. From stop motion movies, computer software writing, and going green, planet saving initiatives to ballet recitals and sports of all kinds, the students used this project as a creative outlet that I believe worked counter to kinds of messages that served to categorize and limit them. For example, in her magazine Allison directly addresses the difficulty she finds in having multiple, competing facets to her identity. She struggles with the message that she can only be an athlete or a "girly" girl. To combat this she offers a unique perspective by taking two photos of herself that represent her soccer playing self and her made-up self. She used photoshop to arrange the images on the page until they were standing back to back. When she presented her work to the class and gave her reasoning behind it, she and her classmates

reveled in her merging of two seemingly “disparate” identities. They commented on how cool it was that she refused to pick one or the other.

### **So What?!?: Implications for Future Classes**

At the conclusion of this class, I was able to reflect on the aspects that were effective and those that, in failing, offered insight into the future of media literacy at my school. My students finished this media literacy course with a better understanding of the prevalence of advertising in our culture and a new kind of literacy in reading those advertisements. They also demonstrated a high level of technical skill and recognition of the manipulation of digital images. Their creation of similarly manufactured images revealed in them a sense of ownership and confidence that was a goal of this experience. Many students shared feelings of relief for having created a magazine that finally represented “real” people with “real” interests, and “real” physical appearances. Susie writes, “I would like to see more magazine covers that display people more like me, less perfect. I think that this would give a better perspective on the fact that nobody’s flawless. I think people might be more confident about themselves if they didn’t constantly see people in magazines that are better looking than them.” Others were more conflicted about their own magazine cover images that were better representations of “regular” people. These students seemed to struggle with the possible benefits of seeing images that were more like them and missing out on the “glitz and glamour” of celebrity. They neither denied the way that ideal images in mainstream media were used by advertisers to promote products and services nor the ways that these strategies caused feelings of ineptitude in its viewers—even in themselves, but they acknowledged instead the pleasure they derived from viewing the unattainable images of the media.

My students began this course with varying levels of exposure to and understanding of media literacy concepts. Throughout the course they developed a common vocabulary that helped them learn to read images. In some cases, a shared set of experiences or common perspectives served to change the ways that they interacted with each other and the world of media around them. Through journaling, class discussions, and projects they found messages about culturally defined notions of consumption, beauty, normality, and authenticity. Students began to develop their own sense of understanding and self expression as a result of this course and laid a solid foundation for the future iterations. Future iterations of the class will take up where the culminating photoshop lesson and magazine project left off. It will ask students to compare their own work to non-mainstream magazines that have been chosen for the class in addition to the predominately mainstream magazines that they researched. I would like to incorporate the work of *Adbusters* magazines, where age appropriate, to spark conversations about how media outlets deal with points of view that differ from, publicly critique, or simply antagonize the cultural mores set forth in the contemporary popular culture. Subsequent questions of interest might be: How does the curriculum of a media literacy course affect the world view of its students? Does a relationship exist between the recognition of the complex cultural forces within media text and the type and amounts of media consumption? Even further in the future, I would like to adapt this current curriculum to address the specific needs of middle school administration, teachers, and parents. In final conclusion, the opportunities for applications and permutations of this course are extraordinarily varied and provide an exciting set of educational opportunities for middle school students and the people in their lives that love them. I look forward to spending many years making this course a staple of the middle school curriculum.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Media Literacy Class Syllabus

Ms. Parks  
[mekisha.parks@hies.org](mailto:mekisha.parks@hies.org)  
 Room MS102

#### Purpose

As the world outside of our classroom becomes increasingly filled with technology, it becomes imperative that the atmosphere within our classrooms keeps pace. The purpose of this quarter course is to address the unique needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century seventh grade student: to safely and effectively integrate technology into their education. There are two sections of seventh grade computer. Each section meets two days a week; the first section meets Monday 10:15-11:05am and Wednesday 1:50-2:40pm, while the second section meets Tuesday 12:55-1:45pm and Friday 9:20-10:10am.

#### Course Learning Objectives

Explore functions of and increase familiarity with Macbook Laptops  
 Continue development of proper keyboarding skills  
 Extend working knowledge of Photoshop, Microsoft Office, iWork and their applications (Word/Pages, Excel/Numbers, Power Point/Keynote)  
 Integrate Internet research, technology, and academic integrity across disciplines  
 Introduce Media Literacy Curriculum

#### Expectations

Students are expected to behave in respectful manners towards each other, all equipment, and all instructors at all times. Students are also expected to attend classes with daily supplies: charged laptop, explanation sheets, paper, and writing utensils. In order to fully participate in this course, all students are required to turn in signed Technology Ethics Contracts that outline the schools' philosophy on appropriate behavior for technology usage. Forms should be turned in to advisors, but can also be submitted to the Middle School office. If there are any questions or concerns, please feel free to drop me an email ([mekisha.parks@hies.org](mailto:mekisha.parks@hies.org)).

#### Late Work

All late work will be accepted within the time parameters of the quarter. Extenuating circumstances regarding penalties for late work will be discussed and handled on a case-by-case basis. Otherwise, late penalties will be assessed as follows:

1 day late	- 10%
2 days late	- 15%
3 days late	- 20%
4 days late	- 25%
5 days or more late	- 50%

#### Grade Calculations

Media Literacy Projects	<b>75%</b>
Homework Journals and Magazine Checks	<b>25%</b>

### Appendix B: Media Literacy Lessons and Tech Projects

<u>Order</u>	<u>Topic Covered</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Media-Tech Project</u>
1st	News	How Much of Media are Ads?	"Counting Ads Project"
2nd	Basic Communication and Skills	Basic Visual Language I: Three Building Blocks	
3rd	News	Basic Visual Language II: How to Analyze a Visual Text	"Photo Composition Project"
4th	Advertisements	10 Ways to Sell an Idea: The Basics of Persuasion	
5th	Advertisements	Ads R Us: Understanding Target Marketing	"Marketing Campaign Project"
6 <sup>th</sup>	Advertisements	"I Can Do THAT!" Creating Your Own Magazine Cover	"Magazine Cover Project"

### Appendix C: Class Discussion Questions by Lesson

I. How Much of Media are Ads?

A. How many pages are ads in a 100-page magazine?

II. Basic Visual Language I: Three Building Blocks

A. Where do we see messages that are not made up of words?

B. Do non-word messages have their own special kind of language?

III. Basic Visual Language II: How to Analyze a Visual Text

A. What do you think about this person based strictly *on the cover of this magazine*?

B. What adjectives describe how he looks to you?

IV. Ways to Sell an Idea: The Basics of Persuasion

A. What is the purpose of advertising?

B. Where do you see ads?

V. Ads R Us: Understanding Target Marketing

A. Have you ever seen different ads for the same product?

B. Why do you think advertisers create different ads for different audiences?

VI. "I Can Do That": Making Your Own Magazine Cover

A. What components make up a typical popular culture magazine?

## Appendix D: Journal Questions

### Media Literacy Journals

#### Journal #1

What are two questions you might ask about the relationship between media makers and advertisers if given the chance to ask?

If a magazine has many ads, why do you think it is not free?

What kinds of magazines do you think have the largest percentage of ads? Why?

#### Journal #2

Find three media images and analyze them based on the basic visual language covered in today's lesson—camera angle, lighting, and composition. Analyze each image by describing the structure of the image and explaining how the camera angle, lighting, and composition affect your response to the image. Be sure to include the three images.

#### Journal #3

Go to [www.medialit.org/pdf/CML\\_DeconstructionMags.pdf](http://www.medialit.org/pdf/CML_DeconstructionMags.pdf) to review the images from class to answer the following questions.

What is different about the body language, eye contact, facial expression, clothing, make-up, background, camera angle, and lighting of the two images? Give specific examples.

#### Journal #4

What is the purpose of advertising?

Do ads ever lie or mislead us? How do ads work?

#### Journal #5

What principles of persuasion did you learn from this activity?

Are you a target audience for some advertisers? Which ones?

### Media Tech Journal

#### Final Project

Are there patterns you see in modified images throughout the media? Describe them.

Are there possible side effects (to you, your parents, your friends, your siblings) of seeing modified images everywhere in the media?

Would you like to see more magazine covers that are like your own in the media? Explain why or why not.

### Appendix E: Class Schedule

Class #	Daily Agenda for Class Today	Items Due in Class Today	Homework for Tonight
1	Media Literacy Introduction	None	Go to class website to print syllabus and class schedule Get syllabus signed Review Class Materials Collect 2 magazines that match your interests and bring them to next class
2	How much of the Media are Ads? Introduce Numbers/Microsoft Excel Introduce "Counting Ads Project"	Signed Syllabus 2 Magazines	Journal Entry # 1
3	Work on "Counting Ads Project"	Journal Entry #1	Complete "Counting Ads Project" - Class # 4
4	Basic Visual Language I: Three Building Blocks Introduce Camera Angle, Composition, and Lighting	"Counting Ads Project"	Journal Entry #2
5	Basic Visual Language II: How to Analyze a Visual Text	Journal Entry #2	Journal Entry # 3
6	Who created this message? Introduce Word/Pages Introduce "Photo Composition Project"	Journal Entry #3	Work on "Photo Composition Project"
7	Work on "Photo Composition Project"	None	Complete "Photo Composition Project" - DUE Class # 8
8	10 Ways to Sell an Idea: The Basics of Persuasion Share Photo Composition Projects	"Photo Composition Project"	Journal Entry # 4 Television Notes - Watch television for 30 minutes and record which persuasion techniques you see for particular companies.
9	Ads R Us: Understanding Target Marketing Introduce Keynote/PowerPoint	Journal Entry #4 TV NOTES	Work on "Marketing Campaign Project" Journal Entry #5 (EXTRA CREDIT)
10	Work on "Marketing Campaign Project"	Journal Entry #5 (EXTRA CREDIT)	Complete "Marketing Campaign Project" - DUE Class # 11

11	Marketing Campaign Presentations	"Marketing Campaign Project"	None
12	Photoshopping in the Media: Uncovering Magazine Covers Introduce "Magazine Cover Project"	None	Work on "Magazine Cover Project"
13	Work on "Magazine Cover Project"	None	Complete "Magazine Cover Project" Presentation - DUE Class # 14
14	Media Message Challenge Presentations	Magazine Cover Project Presentations	Complete "Magazine Cover Project" Reflection Journal - DUE Class # 15
15	Class Wrap Up	Magazine Cover Project Reflection Journal	None

## Appendix F: Media Tech Project Explanations

### COUNTING ADS PROJECT

Use magazines and Microsoft Excel or Numbers to create a spreadsheet and graph.

#### Project Procedures

##### 1) Predict

- Use what you know about media to make an educated guess to the following: In a 100 page magazine, how many pages are advertisements? \_\_\_\_\_

##### 2) Count

- Use two magazines to collect the following data:
  - Number of Pages with Ads
  - Total number of pages in Magazine
  - Percentage of Ads in Magazine

##### 3) Create Table with:

- Your Prediction Percentage
- Number of Pages with Ads
- Total number of pages in Magazine
- Percentage of Ads in Magazine

##### 4) Create Charts (4 total)

- Bar Graph
  - Number of Ads in Magazine 1 vs. Magazine 2
- Circle Graphs
  - Predicted Percentage
  - Percent of Magazine 1 that is advertisement
  - Percent of Magazine 2 that is advertisement

\* Be sure to include the title, keys, and labels; also be sure that chart and table can be fully viewed from one printed page.

Project Evaluation

Table	40%
Charts	40%
<u>Formatting</u>	<u>20%</u>
Total	100%

**PHOTO COMPOSITION PROJECT**

Use a digital camera and Microsoft Word or Pages to create different photographs of a family member (pet, parent, etc.) using the same techniques identified in the Schwarzenegger covers and class discussions.

Construction Techniques

- Camera Angle
  - Low angle
  - High angle
  - Eye level
- Lighting
  - High light
  - Low light
  - Light from above
  - Light from below
- Composition
  - Extreme close-up
  - Tight-shot
  - Wide-shot
  - Extreme wide-shot

Emotional Moods

Shy  
 Suspicious  
 Cautious  
 Confident  
 Triumphant  
 Scared  
 Overwhelmed  
 Surprised  
 Lonely  
 Relieved  
 Relaxed  
 Sympathetic

### Procedures

- 1) Choose one model or subject (adult subjects or pets only unless you have written permission)
- 2) Select three emotional moods
- 3) Compose a photograph that portrays each emotional mood
- 4) List the specific construction techniques (i.e. low camera angle, bright overhead lighting, and extreme close-up) used to convey that meaning
- 5) Write a reflection journal explaining how and why the specific construction techniques you used successfully convey the different feelings you have named

### Project Evaluation

Photograph 1	10%
Photograph 1 Techniques List	10%
Photograph 2	10%
Photograph 2 Techniques List	10%
Photograph 3	10%
Photograph 3 Techniques List	10%
Reflection Journal	40%

To review the images from class, visit the following website:

[www.medialit.org/pdf/CML\\_DeconstructionMags.pdf](http://www.medialit.org/pdf/CML_DeconstructionMags.pdf)

### **MARKETING CAMPAIGN PROJECT**

In groups, you have been challenged to create an advertisement that effectively markets a randomly assigned product to two different target audiences.

#### Niche Marketing

- While it is true that individuals often respond differently to media, it is also true that *similar* groups of people tend to identify with some media messages
  - Athletes may respond to sports drinks ads similarly, while health professionals may have a different response.

- Advertisers often create different ads to sell the same product to different, or *niche*, audiences
- Researched ads often appeal to the fantasies, fears, desires, insecurities, hopes and dreams of the intended market.

### Sample Target Audiences

- |                          |                           |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| ▪ Preschoolers           | ▪ Moms                    |
| ▪ Elementary School Boys | ▪ Dads                    |
| ▪ Teenage Girls          | ▪ Grandparents            |
| ▪ College Students       | ▪ Teachers                |
| ▪ Athletes               | ▪ Elementary School Girls |
| ▪ Janitors               | ▪ Teenage Boys            |

### List of Generic Items

- |                          |                     |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| ▪ Plain white hand towel | ▪ Digital camera    |
| ▪ A plant                | ▪ Plain black frame |
| ▪ A glass of water       | ▪ Flash light       |
| ▪ Plain white t-shirt    |                     |
| ▪ Telephone              |                     |

### Procedures

- 1) Choose group and create name for “Marketing Company”
- 2) Each group will have to plan and execute a strategy to sell the same product to two different groups of people (one assigned and the other chosen)
- 3) Each ad will need a small caption that clearly identifies the target audience, the product name, the product brand, and the marketing company name
- 4) A generic item will be assigned to the group by a “VIP” client
- 5) Create a presentation (in Keynote or Powerpoint) that markets the product to the different target audiences
- 6) Include the answers to the following questions in your presentation:
  - On what characteristics of your target audience did your ad focus?
  - Did you use (or reject) any stereotypes that might be offensive to some groups?
  - What strategies did you reject—and why?
  - What did you learn about how advertising works?

Submit

Your group will submit the following:

2 Clearly captioned advertisements for two different target audiences

1 Keynote presentation that answers the four response questions (listed in procedure #6)

\*Be sure every member of the group has their names attached.

Project Evaluation

Ad #1            20%

Ad #2            20%

Format           20%

Presentation   40%

**MAGAZINE COVER PROJECT**

“I Can Do That!” Creating Your Own Magazine Cover

Now that we have spent time dissecting the components of a magazine cover, you are challenged to create a magazine cover that is all about you; there will be no groups for this assignment.

Sample Magazine Cover Themes

Academics

Sports

Fine Arts

Non-school Hobbies/Interests

Community Service

Family

Summer Plans

Travel Plans

Future Career Aspirations

Global Contributions

Procedures

1) Create a fictional magazine title and cover based one or more of the themes listed above

2) Choose/create the images to be included in your cover

3) Choose the font styles, sizes, colors, and layout for your cover

4) Construct content lures that attract and hold the attention of potential readers (be sure not to sacrifice the integrity of the magazine to do so)

5) Create a presentation (in Keynote or Powerpoint) that explains how you created the magazine cover (be sure to include consult the sample presentation)

Include the following in your presentation:

- Explanations of any digital alterations to your images
- A list of the font styles, sizes, and colors chosen

6) Complete the following journal, be as specific as possible.

Media Tech Project Journal:

Are there patterns you see in modified images throughout the media? Describe them.

Are there possible side effects (to you, your parents, your friends, your siblings) of the seeing modified images everywhere in the media?

Would you like to see more magazine covers that are like your own in the media? Explain why or why not.

Submit

1 Fictional Magazine Cover

1 Keynote presentation that follows the procedures and includes the required information

1 Media Tech Project Journal

Project Evaluation

Magazine Cover	50%
Journal	25%
Presentation	25%
Total	100%

### Appendix G: Triangulation Matrix

Research Question	1	Data Source 2	3
1. What media messages do my students find in images published for a teenage audience?	Document Analysis of Student Journals	Active Participant Observation	Document Analysis of Final Media-tech Project
2. How do students interact with the messages found within these popular culture images?	Focus Group (Class Discussions)	Active Participant Observation	Document Analysis of Final Media-tech Project