"Mow the Lawn": Introduction to Visual Media Analysis

This takes 30-45 minutes.

1. Students watch Jean Kilbourne's *Killing Us Softly 4* in class and read Kilbourne's article "Two Ways a Woman Can Get Hurt" from *Rereading America.*
2. After discussing the Kilbourne article and cultural codes, introduce the idea of completing a visual media analysis as a class using Schick's "Mow the Lawn" commercial on YouTube (Find it here: https://youtu.be/_9JZWpZS6-g).
3. After watching the commercial, you will ask the students questions like
   - What messages does this commercial send about being a woman?
     - The students will hopefully mention that this implies that women should not have body hair and that women without body hair are desirable. This relates back to some of what *Killing Us Softly 4* discusses.
   - What stereotypes of women are you seeing here?
     - Students often talk about the colors being used, the way women are dressed, and how excited the women are to shave their bodies, among other things.
   - What kinds of women are being shown in this commercial?
     - You could mention that all are young, thin, long-haired, and conventionally beautiful. Hopefully, the students will notice that most of the women showed are light-skinned and not women of color.
   - What else is happening in the commercial?
     - I use this question to delve into the racist stereotypes being perpetuated in the commercial. Kilbourne's article (mentioned above) discusses the "Lolita" stereotype of Asian women, and the film explains how Black women are often depicted as "wild" in commercials. I often move the commercial player to show the scene of the Asian woman covering her mouth (0:20-:21) when the text says "some gardens are mighty small" and discuss the stereotype of the submissive Asian woman that shows up in pornography and elsewhere. In addition, I drag the video player to show the Black woman with goggles and violently using the electric hedge trimmer (0:31-0:33) to trim the hedge she is behind because this differentiates her from the Asian woman and the white woman.
     - From there, we discuss how the white woman in the commercial is presented as "normal" or "average" and how this, too, adds to stereotypes.

This type of analysis prepares the students to choose their own piece of visual media for the visual media analysis assignment, and it helps them see that there is more than one way to analyze visual media while using evidence from the Jean Kilbourne film and article to support their analysis.

Mary F. McGinnis, Ph.D.   mmcginnis@ccga.edu