

“Talking Back” to Advertisements and Products

-Caitlin Fedorak

Purpose:

To expose students to the idea that the marketing and advertising of many products influences the hegemonic norm within society. This lesson will specifically focus on the messages toys convey to boys and girls, as well as to society as a whole. Students will be given the opportunity to go to a toy store and find examples of such messages, and will then do an assignment in which they will “talk back” to these messages through any means they wish.

Please note that unless adapted, this lesson will take more than one class

Instructional Procedure:

Introduction

1. Begin by asking the class “how many of you owned a Barbie when you were younger?” “An Easy Bake Oven?” “A Nerf Gun?” “How about G.I. Joes or other action figures?”
2. Tell students to think about the toys they played with (or the toys they always begged their parents for) while they are watching the Youtube video “Toy Ads and Learning Gender” (approx. 8 min): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZn_IJoN6PI
3. Split students into groups of 3-4. Ask groups to discuss toy advertisements they remember from when they were younger, and what kinds of messages they conveyed. Give a personal example. My personal example would be:

When I was about 4 years old, I always saw commercials for “Creepy Crawlers”. They were little jelly-like bugs you could make in a type of moulding contraption. My older brother got one, but I was told I was not allowed to play with it until I was older. I always wanted to make creepy crawlers, and was so envious of my brother who was allowed to do so. Once I got older, I asked if I could play with the creepy crawlers toy. My brother had long since out grown it, so I did not see the problem. Instead, I was given “Jazzy Jewellery”, a toy with essentially the same concept, only instead of making bugs, it made flower and heart shaped charms to string on to necklaces. This incident is one of my earliest memories of gender roles being enforced by toys: girls could not play with bugs, they instead should make jewellery to make themselves look pretty.
4. Ask groups to next consider advertisements they encounter on a regular basis today. Do the messages portrayed in toy commercials continue to follow us into adolescence, and even adulthood? Engage in class discussion regarding this topic. Create a list on the board of the messages childhood toy advertisements (as well as others) portray to society.
5. Remind students about the “reel grrls” voice-over which “talked back” to the message in the toy makeup/doll advertisement. Explain other methods that can be used to “talk back” to these messages (i.e. counterads).

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Data Collection ****This section will probably take at least an hour of class time****

1. Students will be expected to do some data collection for an assignment regarding “talking back” to advertisements and products. The assignment will be fairly open-ended: students can use any means they like to “talk back” (i.e. counterad, voice over, written pieces, oral presentation, artwork, etc.).
2. Go over criteria for assignment with students – however they choose to do their assignment is fine, they just need to ensure that they meet the necessary outcomes and standards. Criteria include:
 - The message being “talked back to” is clear
 - An awareness of the message and its effect on society is evident
 - The message is “talked back to” in a creative format
 - Evidence of analysis of the message
3. Take students to a toy store, and have them look for toys that enforce the messages portrayed by the advertisements discussed earlier. Students can take pictures or make notes regarding what they find. Encourage students to pay attention to the ads they see on T.V., in magazines, on billboards, etc. in order to find more ideas for their assignment.

****Students will probably need a few hours of class time to work on these projects****

Presentation of Assignments

1. After students have completed their projects, students will be given the option of how they want to present their projects – they can either present in front of the class or in a one-on-one interview set up with the teacher.
2. After presentations/interviews, students will be able to do a self-assessment on the project. These self-assessments will be handed in and taken into consideration during my own summative assessment of the projects.