

PicturePerfect Study Guide

By Carol Tizzano

This guide provides questions, ideas, and simple activities to help facilitators engage participants. It can be easily modified for either pre-screening or post-screening use. Please handle the topics with the care and sensitivity that your students or participants require.

1 Introduction: “I totally don’t look how I am supposed to look.”

Key interviewees talk about an area of personal insecurity related to their appearance.

Invite student discussion about areas of personal insecurity related to their own appearance (students may prefer to write privately).

Invite student discussion or writing about friends and family who have expressed displeasure with an aspect of their appearance. How common is this type of expression among people they know? Based on their experience, is it more common among males or females? Explore why.

Invite student discussion or writing about what they value and like about their appearance. Discuss whether it was more difficult for them to recognize what they perceive as positive or negative attributes.

2 Advertising: “I still don’t see the jeans.”

How ads idealize, objectify and hyper-sexualize girls and women, creating an unrealistic beauty standard.

Scan typical magazines that target preteen and teen females. What themes are common? How realistic are the images?

Ask students to be aware of what product an ad is trying to sell. Then ask them to evaluate how often the item being advertised is clearly shown. How often do they have NO idea about what an ad is trying to sell? If the item is not depicted, what else is being sold?

Ask students to clearly describe the expressions and postures depicted in print ads (TV ads may be used as well).

After flipping through popular magazines, discuss whether or not ads show girls and women in a diverse range of productive activities.

3 Fashion & Magazines: “Wow – what’s wrong with me?”

Magazine and fashion industries target girls and women with appearance-obsessed messages, ignoring more meaningful aspects of development and life.

Ask students to categorize the text on popular magazine covers. How often does it address outer appearances and how often does it address other aspects of a person? Discuss how these types of magazines help (or do not help) foster the development of a well-rounded person?

The preteen population routinely uses teen magazines. It’s well known that *Seventeen* magazine is read by girls who are much younger. Ask slightly older students to talk about what they would not want younger siblings, family members, and others to see and read in these magazines. Discuss why.

Provide students with a copy of the publication *Teen Voices*. Ask them to compare and contrast it with a popular magazine like *Teen* or *Seventeen*.

4 Music Videos: “Women, they just seem to be like toys.”

Music videos routinely hyper-sexualize young women, showing females in marginal roles – like props or decorations.

Screen a music video (or this segment of *PicturePerfect*) without sound and ask students to carefully describe the activity and appearance of females depicted in the video. Encourage students to pay attention to details within the frame including dress, location, and movement. Students should also notice how the women are seen through the camera lens (shot distance and angle, camera movement, etc.).

Discuss why Tia compares women in music videos to toys. Is her comparison well supported by what you see in videos? Why or why not?

Ask students to talk or write about how they feel when they see these images.

5 Sex: “With no consequences, for one thing.”

Frequent media messages promote damaging sexual stereotypes and rarely depict sexual responsibility.

Ask students to discuss where they obtain most of their information about sex. Then ask them to list the risks associated with sexual activity.

Discuss how often these risks and methods of displaying sexual responsibility are shown in entertainment programs targeted at teens and young adults.

Discuss the terms “good girl” and “bad girl.” Clarify what the terms mean and whether or not they ring true among young people today.

6 Body Image & Media: “They just skipped over a whole world of people.”

Female preoccupation with and insecurity about weight, size, and shape starts early, fueled by unrealistically thin media images of girls and women.

Ask students what they thought when they saw that “The number one wish of American women is to lose weight.” Explore whether or not this desire is just a concern about good health and well-being.

Discuss the costs of being preoccupied with something. If girls and women become overly concerned about weight and size, what is lost?

7 Cosmetics & Hair: “You have to go through torture to get it fixed.”

Media obsession with impossible female perfection sets the stage for billions of dollars in cosmetics sales every year.

After reviewing a magazine cover and flipping through the magazine, discuss what industries stand to benefit financially (fashion, cosmetics, hair, diet, etc.).

8 Early Influences: “Barbie, you got it all together.”

Products aimed at children – toys, movies, computer games, clothing and more – powerfully reinforce traditional gender stereotypes.

Invite students to identify attributes that create a well-rounded person. Then invite discussion about which attributes are often identified with being a woman or a man (girl or boy). Discuss any noteworthy discrepancies between the characteristics associated with being a well-rounded person and with being male or female in our culture.

Further discuss how both girls and boys and women and men can benefit from characteristics associated with both genders.

Explore advertising targeting children. Look at the use of different techniques. Often it’s helpful to start with advertising that tends to rely less heavily on gender stereotypes. Using toy ads, explore whether or not the ad hype matched their satisfaction with the actual products. This is where the “tricks” used in producing media – particularly ads – can be exposed. Children, teens, and even adults can recognize how drastically different real world experiences are compared with those that are media-constructed.

9 Closing: “I am NOT a Barbie doll.”

Thoughts about dealing with our powerful media culture.

Revisit the power of constant and pervasive exposure to media messages. Compare attention paid to a healthy diet and lifestyle to the media diet consumed by many Americans. Discuss the deficits and benefits.

Explore creative ways of responding to media messages that students find insulting, offensive, absurd, or just ridiculous. Try activities like creating ad collages that employ parody techniques.

Address ways to cultivate personal strength and a solid identity in the face of pressures from media culture. Educate yourself and others. Recognize that the impact of media culture is both an individual and social concern – therefore remedies and responses that address both are essential. Explore ways to make a social impact – conduct protests, boycotts, and letter writing campaigns. Advocate for education and public policy that supports diverse, intelligent, and independent media. Become a media literate person and advocate for the mandatory inclusion of media literacy in education. Understand that independent and thoughtful media and a media literate population are necessary for a democratic society.



video available from
Fanlight Productions
(800) 937-4113