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Media images of women – more thoughts on expectations – past and present.

Saturday, March 16, 2013

I can always count on the thoughtful comments of Sparkers to get me thinking beyond my original blog entries.

As someone who has lived through a lot of the history being remembered during Women's History month, I've witnessed the changes in how women are viewed in the media. I've always maintained that our goal was, is (or should be) that women have choices in life. Preparing ourselves to be strong and self sufficient is important. You just never know when you will need to be both.

Back in the 50s/early 60s the majority of married women were housewives. If they worked outside the home, they were most likely in one of the traditionally female fields - teachers, secretarial workers, nurses, seamstresses and hairdressers. They had something else in common. They were all relatively low paid jobs.

So was there anything really wrong with ads like this?



They did the cleaning too. Again it was reality, although I don't remember my mother and her friends being quite as happy about it as these women seem to be.

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It's interesting that General Mills and Kellogg's included the weight management/health/energy angle.

TV shows of the era maintained this stereotype. Women were housewives and maintained the house while impeccably dressed. Remember Mrs. Cleaver's pearls, anyone?

I want to thank Boilham who in a comment on my blog (March 12th) reminded me of a TV series "Life of Riley" where "Chester A. Riley was an overweight, dimwitted blue collar worker. Riley was the constant long suffering victim of his own stupidity. His entire family and gorgeous wife constantly besting him in all his schemes." He further pointed out that this is a theme that has been repeated throughout the decades. (along with the husband and ditsy wife scenario, I must add).

However, Boilham is absolutely right. It takes brains to run a household and if you can be gorgeous doing it, that's OK with me.

There was also nothing wrong with showing women as housewives. It was a noble profession after all and that's what most women were.

So, why do I still think those old ads and TV shows were a negative influence?

Looking back, I think it's because they were the ONLY IMAGES we were shown. Men may have been shown as bungling idiots occasionally, but they were also doctors, lawyers, insurance salesmen, police officers or even factory workers who in spite of limitations (like Riley's) still brought home a paycheck.

Yes, there was "Our Miss Brooks" and "Private Secretary," but teacher and secretarial worker were fields we already knew were open to women, at least until they could find a husband. Miss Brooks' pursuit of Mr. Boyton, the biology teacher, was a main theme and we all expected Suzy McNamara to end up with the boss Mr. Sands eventually.

Today young women have many opportunities and role models, both real and fictitious, for career paths.

The difficulty they face today is that their body image is still often shaped by the media. Then there's the pressure to "have it all" which is another blog topic entirely.

There's nothing wrong with showing slim, fit woman in advertising campaigns or in entertainment. They are REAL women after all. The problem is that they aren't the ONLY real women in the world. They definitely should not be banned in favor of some "new normal" even if the majority of us are larger than previous generations. What we need are diverse images that show us we are not defined by our body parts, nor should we be divided into opposing camps because of our personal choices by those seeking publicity for themselves.

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TINAJANE76

I'm a big fan of movies from the late 1920s and early 1930s before the Hays Code was implemented by the major studios and am constantly shocked at how progressive many of the women seemed in these films. They weren't all housewives and often had or aspired to important jobs, were as sassy and intelligent as their male counterparts, came from a variety of backgrounds AND managed to retain their femininity. I really think the more "moralistic" attitude that was adopted in films, TV and the media in general set back progress for women by decades in the sense that the feminine ideal became limited to one image that didn't necessarily represent all women. I think the trauma of World War II made the situation even worse and made society as a whole long for the image of the old days of a traditional and perfect home life that had probably never existed in the first place--at least not in the idealized images we see presented on TV and in advertising from the 1950s and early 1960s.

3011 days ago

Comment edited on: 3/17/2013 3:54:04 PM



CELIAMINER

I think back to "I Love Lucy," "Father Knows Best," and other shows and cringe at how women were portrayed as ditzes or pouty and immature. Then the backlash came with strong women and hopelessly incompetent men. Is there a happy medium?

3011 days ago



LIBBYL1

It is the stereotyping and subtle reinforcement of others perception of what is a good or perfect wife/woman/mother/daughter/lover etc.... that still pervades in the media and advertising that gets to me.... And how it affects young boys and girls. There should be media literacy courses in all schools showing children how to critically look at media.

I once a long time ago saw a very interesting photo juxtaposition that showed how the look on the faces of women in so many adverts these days of lipstick clothes cars etc etc is very like the expression on women porn stars faces - slightly open mouths etc.... It was quite scary to see...

3011 days ago



CD8467616

And Eve Arden was SO gay.

3011 days ago



DONNA5281

THANK YOU!
for sharing.

3011 days ago



DR1939

This is a little off topic but your opening sentence made me think of one of the things I see as a major contribution of the feminist movement, the inclusion of all types of minorities in all forms of the media. It's important to remember that feminism isn't only about equality for women, but for all people of all races, creeds, colors, genders. The importance of this variety in television newscasting is often overlooked. Not only do we now get a greater variety of role models but we get different viewpoints.

And how about the pregnant newscasters/weather reports/etc. Now that's progress and I can be proud of the role I had in preparing these women for these challenges.

3012 days ago



MJZHERE

I had to laugh at the ad about keeping up your house. My extremely thin mother would say

that if woman would clean their homes they would get all the exercise they need and not have to go to the gym. This is funny because as soon as they opened a gym in our area, my mom immediately bought lifetime memberships for every family member - and she went without fail almost every day (she didn't make much use of the equipment but she loved to swim). Of course her house still stayed spic n span - whe would do exercises with Jack Lalaine and Page Palmer on tv while she cleaned up after five kids.
3012 days ago



CD12494098



Great BLOG on body image.

I know the mothers of the 60's often turned into dissallusioned 70's mom's that found themselves entering the work place in a whole lot of various position outside the traditional roles from women. There was a great strides made in searching their dreams also. My mother was a housewife through the 60's but entered the workplace as an office manager for a great high powered political organization. She was more content and happy, she was still mom and was available to us (as her office was within walking distance of our home).

I agree that the diversity of body images is essential now that woman are represented in all different shapes and sizes in all different careers and are still able to manage the busy schedule of a home with children.

There are some great roll models out there for woman, just wish we saw more of them in the news and in PR campaigns.

3012 days ago



HELEN_BRU



Although from my era, I find those ads so disgusting!

3012 days ago



SUZYMOBILE



This morning, our local daily had a front-page story trumpeting the fact that the "ace" of the a nearby truck-driving school's graduating class (of 4 people) was a 37-year-old woman. Really? This is front-page news? I guess the stereotype of the woman who can't drive and knows nothing about automotive matters still isn't dead around here. I know another woman who works construction, who would probably be steamed about this article, too. (Now there's a topic for another blog!)

3012 days ago



SLIMMERJESSE



I've always been lucky to have a lifelong comfort in my own skin. While very young, I realized the tyranny of the media in its damaging stereotyping of women and steered away from media. I watch no TV, do not read magazines (don't enjoy them), and am not enamored with the lives of others via internet news of celebrities.

3012 days ago



MISCHAKEO



Good blog. I agree with you about needing to see more diversity in the media..not just the perfect thin female. The pressure still exists on young girls to be perfect and very thin, Many girls in their teens have already had plastic surgery!

3012 days ago



AUSFAM



Thank you gain for another great blog. I was expecting the body image to rule this blog; however, I love the angle you took with the portrayal of women as a whole in media. I remember when Katie Couric took the nightly news anchor position and howich scuttle there was over it. I couldn't understand why it was such a big deal but now I realize that I have always been able to see women in "men's" positions. Maybe it's partly my personality (and my mom's encouragemebt) but I've always thought I can do anything any other person can do--it's my choice to decide what I want to do. Sure you learn about women's rights in school but it hasn't really sink in and hit home until the last two years. Maybe it was having a daughter of my own, maybe it was turning 30, maybe it was leaving the working world for a more at home position, but it's finally all sinking in and I'm happy that it is! Thanks again!

3012 days ago



GINIEMIE



I enjoyed "womanly pursuits". Knitting, cooking, sewing, taking care of my husband and my family. I enjoyed the fact that my husband made enough, when many of my friends were having to seek employment to help the family budget. I said it before, I did not like stereotyping and still don't. It smacks of discrimination. I loved it when looking at some of the Sears & JC Penney catalogues I would see people of varying sizes. Of course they were also advertising clothing for the larger figured person, but at least they didn't do it with teenie people. I know the struggles we went through as a family of -going up to 12. Financially it was difficult, especially since my parents sent us to Catholic schools, and my mom took us "home" (to Belgium) to visit our grandparents, aunts, uncles & cousins twice during my childhood. Mom was a seamstress and a very good one. She also designed my sisters wedding dress. She created mine from a picture I drew, using various images from a bridal magazine.

As much as I enjoy the advancements we have made, I do not enjoy the increased stress that it has created on families and women.

That's the side of "equality" that I could do without.



3012 days ago



SOPHIEDO13



I can certainly relate to the money issues of working. When I was a teenager in the mid 70's I remember the tv commercial jingle "bringing home the bacon fry it up in a pan because I'm a woman". The only problem with this is that is all a woman made in my age group is enough to bring home the groceries at a full time job !! I was in the Mortgage business and banking and traditionally those are low paying, so now I stay home and enjoy the "housewife routine" !! I'm glad our situation has improved from those earlier years that affords me the opportunity to do so, because I was totally burned out on not making enough money !!. On to more happier memories



and to the future
3012 days ago

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