

Women's Rights Newscast

Class Procedure: The class will be graded together on the flow of the newscast and the organization between groups along with the final segment the group creates. Each class will choose an anchor and a co-anchor who will set the order of the presentation and handle the lead ins to the subtopics, writes and reads off the lead story. In addition, an Executive Producer and editor will work with this group.

Preparation: Read your section interactively noting some statistics and ideas you'd like to include in the newscast. Consider these questions for your topic:

What were the chief frustrations of the women's movement on your topic?

What were the most prominent successes of the women's movement in your topic area?

What obstacles and failures did feminists experience in fighting for change?

In what significant ways did the reforms change American society?

Did the women achieve full equity in your area?

What remains to be done to earn equality?

Bring some costumes and props to class that you might use for your story.

Day of: Write the script of your story, find appropriate attire and for your presentation, rehearse it, film it (2-4 minutes) and edit it. Yes, in literally one period so get to work.

Media & Beauty Key Concerns of the Women's Movement Many in the women's movement believed that media images of women and women's fashions played a key part in women's oppression (unjust and severe control of a group). Feminists sought to reduce society's emphasis on women's looks and beauty and to shift the emphasis to their talents and strength.

Objectification of Women The women's movement argued that media images and advertisements objectified women, presenting them as objects to be looked at rather than active, unique individuals. Feminists noted that while the media focused on men's intelligence and capabilities, it emphasized women's looks, reinforcing the idea that a woman's worth was based on her beauty. Feminists asserted that objectification served to make women uncomfortable, distracted from important issues such as equal pay for women, and kept women continually dependent on men's approval. *Advertising Age* promoted this focus in 1969, saying "Magazines help distressed damsels remake their wardrobes, faces, hair, body, . . . sometimes their whole way of being. And the ladies love it. And beg for more. When she gets involved with herself and fashion, in any magazine, she's a captive cover to cover." Many feminists stressed that such focus on women's physical attributes reinforced men's belief that it was acceptable to judge women based solely on their looks. As Marcia Fluer explains in *In the Company of Women*, some men openly discriminated against women based on their appearance:

An early producer—a very large, balding, beige man—said...he didn't know if I was going to last [in journalism], and he wouldn't have hired me anyway, if he'd been there. I thought that was fair because when I started I really didn't have any experience on television or in reporting. I knew I was a token [person hired to show that employers do not discriminate]. But that was fine because I was going to prove myself but he said the reason he wouldn't have hired me was

because I have a funny mouth. Not a dirty mouth, or a big mouth—but the shape of my mouth. And this from a man who looks like a turnip!

Standards of Beauty Feminists also objected to narrow standards of beauty created by advertisements. Feminists criticized the growing advertising industry for emphasizing that women could be beautiful only if they conformed to the ads' images of youthful, slim-waisted, voluptuous white women. They said such standards damaged girls' self-esteem and body image and made them perpetually concerned with their looks. Women of color spoke out against the racism that encouraged them to try to look white. For example, black women's magazines encouraged women to lighten their skin and straighten their hair. In addition, advertising often ignored women of color completely, as one woman described: "We've not been seen. It's only been in the last couple of years that even the ads recognized the fact that we use toothpaste."

Miss America Pageant One particular focus of the women's movement was beauty pageants such as the Miss America contest, which reinforced the idea that women were objects to be gazed at and judged. The women's movement demanded that society—and men specifically—give women the respect they deserved for their talents and freedom from narrow standards of beauty. In September 1968, a group called New York Radical Women (NYRW) staged a protest of the Miss America contest in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Over 200 protesters gathered where the contest was being held. They threw "woman-garbage" such as bras, girdles, hair curlers, and women's magazines like *Cosmopolitan* into a "Freedom Trash Can" to express their rejection of women as sex objects. NYRW compared the beauty pageant to animals being judged at a county fair, and criticized the "ludicrous 'beauty' standards [women] are conditioned to take seriously." They protested the pageant's racism and stated that "there [has] [n]ever been a true Miss America—an American Indian." Finally, the protest organizers pointed out, "In this reputedly democratic society, where every little boy supposedly can grow up to be President, what can every little girl hope to grow to be? Miss America. That's where it's at.. men are judged by their actions, women by their appearance."

Changes in Beauty Standards Despite feminists' continued protests, the Miss America pageant remained a part of American society. However, the women's movement inspired many women to examine and protest their role as sex objects, and to reject female stereotypes to create new, diverse standards of beauty. During the 1960s and 1970s, many women stopped wearing make up, wore their hair natural (instead of curling, ironing, or teasing it), and expressed pride in their individual, unique appearance. In addition, women athletes emerged as admirable examples of women's strength.

The women's movement also successfully presented alternative images of women. Some women published new women's magazines, such as *Ms.*, which focused on women's intellectual and health concerns, and encouraged women to redefine beauty. For example, as one woman wrote to *Ms.* magazine: "Makeup is often called a mask—only true if the woman wearing it believes it. A woman's true soul shines through squeaky-clean skin or a pound of pancake stick. Let little girls play with makeup. Emphasize the play." Feminists raised women's consciousnesses to consider for themselves what made them feel good, what image they wanted to portray, and what beauty meant to them. In addition, many feminists tended to agree that images went hand in hand with reality, and that positive, powerful images would lead to more positive, powerful women.

Provocative Images: Provocative images of women's partly clothed or naked bodies are especially prevalent in advertising. Shari Graydon, former president of Canada's MediaWatch, argues that women's bodies are sexualized in ads in order to grab the viewer's attention. Women become sexual objects when their bodies and their sexuality are linked to products that are bought and sold. Many researchers argue that the over-representation of thin women in mass media reinforces the conclusion that "physically attractive" and "sexually desirable" mean "thin." Amy Malkin's study of magazine covers reveals that messages about weight loss are often placed next to messages about men and relationships. Some of her examples: "Get the Body You Really Want" beside "How to Get Your Husband to Really Listen." and "Stay Skinny" paired with "What Men Really Want."

Unattainable Beauty Perhaps most disturbing is the fact that media images of female beauty are unattainable for all but a very small number of women. Researchers generating a computer model of a woman with Barbie-doll proportions, for example, found that her back would be too weak to support the weight of her upper body, and her body would be too narrow to contain more than half a liver and a few centimeters of bowel. A real woman built that way would suffer from chronic diarrhea and eventually die from malnutrition. Still, the number of real life women and girls who seek a similarly underweight body is epidemic, and they can suffer equally devastating health consequences. Images of female bodies are everywhere. Women—and their body parts—sell everything from food to cars. Popular film glorifies becoming younger, taller and thinner. Yet some of the actresses have even been known to faint on the set from lack of food. Women's magazines are full of articles urging that if they can just lose those last twenty pounds, they'll have it all—the perfect marriage, loving children, great sex, and a rewarding career. It is estimated that the diet industry alone is worth \$100 billion a year.

The Culture of Thinness Researchers report that women's magazines have ten and one-half times more ads and articles promoting weight loss than men's magazines do, and over three-quarters of the covers of women's magazines include at least one message about how to change a woman's bodily appearance—by diet, exercise or cosmetic surgery'. The Pamela Andersonesque ideal of feminine beauty is physically impossible for the majority of women to attain, yet we continue to measure ourselves by these standards. Seeing as Pam herself needed the help of a plastic surgeon and a little silicone to reach the heights of sex-appeal that she would soon define, it should come as no surprise that more and more women are choosing to go under the knife in an effort to graft themselves into an objective and arbitrary ideal of feminine beauty. Even though many women are, at least initially, happy with the results of their surgery, one successful surgery will seldom be enough to help them attain society's elusive beauty ideal. Far from being a source of pleasure and a solution to all their problems, the decision to re-form oneself according to an arbitrary image of beauty too often leads us right back where we started from: dissatisfaction with the figure that appears before us in the mirror, and yet another trip to the surgeon's office. Although a psychological study from the 80s states that undergoing plastic surgery 'For a reason other than trauma, must be considered a clear symptom of neurosis,' cosmetic surgery today has become a commonplace.

Jean Kilbourne argues that the overwhelming presence of media images of painfully thin women means that real women's bodies have become invisible in the mass media. The real tragedy,

Kilbourne concludes, is that many women internalize these stereotypes, and judge themselves by the beauty industry's standards. Women learn to compare themselves to other women, and to compete with them for male attention. This focus on beauty and desirability "effectively destroys any awareness and action that might help to change that climate."