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DePaul University  
School of Education

WHAT'S ALL THAT NOISE?:  
A STUDY OF CONSTRUCTED GENDER MEANINGS  
IN NEWS PUBLICATIONS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

A Thesis in  
Social and Cultural Foundations of Education

by

Laura M. Moran

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Arts in Education

June 2010

The Thesis of Laura M. Moran, in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education  
Master's Program at DePaul University's School of Education, is hereby approved.

*Karen Monkman*

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*6-1-2010*

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Date

## **Abstract**

It is nearly impossible to escape from the influence of media in today's world, between newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the Internet. School settings are no exception to this rule and even allow the in-school distribution of publications produced by major media companies. These publications can be used for entertainment purposes or as supplements to classroom lessons, but they can also contribute to the replication of unbalanced and highly stereotypical representations of gender at a time when their readers are typically struggling to create their own identities. Four issues of two different in-school news publications were studied to gain a better understanding of what these publications might be doing to attract students and how they might be negatively influential through the constructed representations of gender.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

As print newspapers watch their distributions steadily decline due to the continuing growth of the Internet and a changing industry, they are coming up with new ways to establish their audiences. One tactic has been to start trying to reach readers at a younger age, make news a part of their daily lives and start to develop their news habits. One area for fostering these daily news habits is through school settings. Schools are not exempt from the ever-present media. On the contrary, they are a place where large media companies can reach a targeted and constantly regenerating audience.

Newspapers, news television programs, and news websites are in the mix with textbooks and lectures in terms of in-school resources for learning. But it would be foolish to think that they are there solely for educational reasons or altruistic purposes. Teens are a highly sought after group for advertisers and if established media companies can provide access for advertising and a resource for education, they have a beneficial combination to supplement what they have been losing in terms of subscribers.

But what are the true values of these school-distributed news publications and what other unintended consequences might result from them? In this study, I will examine the messages being sent by these publications, focusing particularly on the role they play in the construction of gender through the utilization of stereotypes. I aim to answer the following questions:

What meanings are constructed through the messages conveyed in these types of publications? How is gender represented? Do these types of publications replicate or challenge social stratification? How might they influence students' identities? How are news events portrayed and what meaning is being assigned by the stories chosen to run?



What is done to make these publications appeal to students? How might students be aware of the societal messages being communicated and how might educators help foster this awareness?

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

In this chapter I will survey existing literature primarily covering gender and media. The review will begin with the concept of gender, terminology related to gender, how gender is socially constructed, and theories on how gender functions as a social institution. I will then look at gender in the media, how the media uses stereotypical gender portrayals and what their influences might include. A summary of several studies done on gender representations in the media will provide examples of previously released findings and research information. The review of literature in relation to media will begin with a look at participatory media and how users can and do interact with publications. I will look at recent shifts in technology that now allow media consumers to become media producers and how professional media companies have attempted to manage or at least utilize these advancements. Finally, I will take a brief look at theories of media literacy and formal media literacy programs and how they may or may not positively impact adolescents.

### **Gender**

Gender is not a simple idea that neatly divides into categories of male and female, him and her, masculine and feminine. Instead, it is a complex social institution that is inescapable. It helps people define themselves and each other. It guides behaviors and is integral in creating and maintaining identities. Understanding the concept of gender helps in identifying and evaluating its social role and, particularly for this study, its role in the media.

### *Concept of Gender*

In her book *Paradoxes of Gender*, Judith Lorber writes about the social construction of gender saying that, "As a social institution, gender is one of the ways that human beings organize their lives," (15) She discusses the difference between "sex" and "gender" and why they are at times wrongly treated synonymous:

Western society's values legitimate gendering by claiming that it all comes from physiology--female and male procreative differences. But gender and sex are not equivalent, and gender as a social construction does not flow automatically from genitalia and reproductive organs, the main physiological differences of females and males. (17)

Sex, sex category, and gender are three terms that are closely linked but distinctly different. Sex is "a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria." One's placement in a sex category is "achieved through application of the sex criteria...established and sustained by the socially required identification displays that proclaims one's membership in one or the other category." And gender is "the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category" (West and Zimmerman 127).

West and Zimmerman also state that "a person's gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but more fundamentally, it is something that one *does*, and does recurrently, in interaction with others" (140). Gender is not isolated, but instead it is constantly being constructed and reconstructed throughout one's life.

Gender has "many components as a social institution and as an individual status" (Lorber 30). In terms of a social institution, gender is made up of things like "gender status," "gendered division of labor," "gendered social control," "gender imagery," and "gender ideology." But for an individual, gender includes one's "sex category," "gender

identity,” “gender beliefs,” and “gender display” (31). Gender is part of self and gender is part of society. The society that one lives in significantly impacts gender development and identity. Like other societal systems “gender involves cultural beliefs and distributions of resources at the macro level, patterns of behavior and organizational practices at the interactional level, and selves and identities at the individual level” (Ridgeway and Correll 511).

Adolescence serves as a critical time in the development of gender. Judith Lorber discusses three main sections of this development from childhood through adulthood saying that as children, we develop our “gendered personality structures” through observing and engaging with our parents. But, as adolescents, we start conducting “sexual behavior according to gendered scripts. In adulthood we “take on a gendered social status in...society’s stratification system” (22).

During adolescence, we are guided into “gendered work and family roles” with the help of “schools, parents, peers, and the mass media” (Lorber 22). Schools play a large part in the construction of gender and unlike race and class, home is not somewhere that one escapes from gender and the pressures associated with it (Ridgeway and Correll 512).

The controlling guidance of gender provides direction, but can also steer individuals into an unbalanced division of labor and a stratified society. By essentially informing people as to what they should be, gender also tells people what they should *not* be. Ridgeway and Correll write, The core aspects of gender beliefs consist of both a hierarchical dimension that associates men with greater status and instrumental competence and a horizontal dimension of fundamental difference that associates each

sex with what the other is not” (527). In concordance with that logic, gender beliefs would then associate women with lesser status, instrumental incompetence and the idea that they are the opposite of everything tied to masculinity.

### ***Gender and the Media***

Mass media is one of the ways that gender is repeatedly confirmed and reestablished and the time of adolescence is particularly relevant (Lorber 22). At all stages of personal development, “individuals engage media texts that reproduce gender stereotypes, which influence their social perceptions” (Fitts). During adolescence “media messages may serve as one source of information used to make life choices” (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro 132).

Stereotypical gender portrayals are an inherent part of the social construction of gender, which is “the intentional construction of representation and meaning into stereotypical gendered distinctions which have very little to do with any ‘natural’ human characteristics.” The “pervasiveness” of these stereotypes “easily makes them appear commonsense, universal, ‘natural’, and ‘true’” (Luke 6).

Mass media is practically inescapable and the messages it sends can permeate and be permanent. An entry in the *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society* notes, “media make up one of the most influential formal social structures through which gender is constructed. Yet gender is almost always represented stereotypically” (Fitts).

In her book *Gender: Psychological Perspectives*, Linda Brannon talks about the power that the media holds and just how influential it can be as people adjust their behaviors to mimic what they observe.:

Media portrayals can be so powerful and persuasive that these portrayals become the standard on which people judge what is normal and desirable for their own lives...People look at the media and see what they believe they should be; then they attempt to change their behavior to fit the media presentation. (14)

Recognizing the power that the media holds, particularly in maintaining the status quo through stereotypical representations of gender, has led to numerous studies about gender in the media and its effects on adolescent readers.

### *Studies of Gender and the Media*

In a study about portrayals of gender in teen movies and gender-based attitudes and beliefs, the data suggests that the viewing of these movies “is associated with negative stereotypes about female friendships and gender roles” (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro 131). The study points out that based on the research, “it would be expected that consumption of teen movies would have an analogous influence on audience members’ gender-based attitudes and beliefs” (131). But fictional television and movies are not the only mediums responsible for portrayals of gender that adolescents consume. Daily television news reports constantly provide gender portrayals from which people learn (Brannon 14). Print publications, like magazines and newspapers, as well as online publications also provide endless portrayals of gender, many in a stereotypical sense.

Editorial content and advertorial content may have distinctly different purposes, but advertisements in the media are similarly responsible for stereotypical portrayals of gender as they “create cultural cues that tell individuals about the nature of society and how things are connected to larger social forces, in this case gender performance” (Fitts). Unfortunately these messages used to promote products use highly stereotypical gender images and “the lessons [in advertising] for girls is that women are generally mindless

and powerless, either domestic drudges or saintly supermoms, sexual sirens or brain-dead bimbos” (Luke 4).

A study out of the Netherlands examined the difference between magazines intended for teenage girls and magazines intended for teenage boys, and the stereotypes associate with each. The study did not limit the scope to visual images, but also did a language analysis of words and their connotation. In terms of language, the study’s linguistic analysis determined that the magazines for teenage girls included an abundance of emotion-related words while magazines for teenage boys had a larger measure of tough words (Willemsen 857). In terms of subject matter, the study found that just about half of the pages in the magazine for girls were devoted to “feminine gender stereotypic topics,” while only one-third of the pages in the magazine for boys were devoted to “two stereotypically masculine subjects, celebrities and hobbies” (857).

Another study examining gender stereotypes in print media, creatively titled “He’s a Laker; She’s a Looker,” focused on the consequences of these portrayals. It discussed that “for women, being an athlete contradicts the conventional female role” and so the media coverage tends to center around other aspects of “femaleness,” like appearance, and coverage of male athletes focuses on athletic achievements and accomplishments without any mention of their sex (Knight and Giuliano 219). In terms of the consequences of these stereotypical portrayals, the study confirmed “people’s perceptions of athletes are influenced by the gender of the athlete and by the type of media coverage” (223).

Ironically, even media coverage on gender studies and how gender is portrayed stereotypically provides portrayals of gender. “Gender has become such a hot research

topic that news stories on gender research appear frequently on television, in newspapers, and in magazines,” writes Linda Brannon (16). However, some of the most important details are lost in the watered-down version of the findings that is created for the media and “the way those findings are reported (in addition to the findings themselves) shapes people’s beliefs about the importance of gender in determining behavior” (Brannon 16).

The type of media that creates influential gender portrayals is not limited to the mass media, like entertainment or news. Even works that are created for in-school use are responsible for these portrayals and “the media texts students are exposed to daily, year after year, are the very texts which help shape their understandings of social in/equalities” (Luke 2).

A study about the images selected for use in sociology textbooks examined how both race and gender are portrayed in an educational setting. The study did a quantitative assessment of what pictures were published, how females and males were represented and how different races were portrayed. The focus on images was because “pictures are a potent medium for conveying underlying assumptions about who is a social actor in various context” (Ferree and Hall 501). Through an analysis of the quantity of representations in images combined with the composition of the images, they found that “although authors and publishers may strive to be fair, the way that race and gender representation is constructed in introductory sociology textbooks tends to reflect rather than critique popular American stereotypes” (50).

## **Media**

“Media” is a term that is often referenced and readily understood, but rarely defined. The understanding of what “media” comprises changes quickly with technology.



A Webster's dictionary definition from 1997 of the word "media" is already extremely outdated: "The means of communication, as radio, television, newspapers, and magazines, with a wide reach and influence" (815). Although it was little over a decade ago, there is no mention of the Internet, which is perhaps one of the most prevalent forms of media today. The evolution of media leads to new opportunities as well as challenges.

### ***Participatory Media***

In his book, *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins talks about the combining of the older, traditional media with "new media," in which it will be expected, if a company wants to survive, that there will be a space dedicated to letting what were traditionally known as "users" now be "contributors". He writes that audiences "are demanding the right to participate within the culture. Producers who fail to make their peace with this new participatory culture will face declining goodwill and diminished revenues" (Jenkins 24).

There is a movement happening through which the "democratization of once-unaffordable tools of production and distribution are unleashing creativity on a fantastic scale" (Gillmor, *Where Citizens and Journalists Intersect* 11). These tools include free blogging software, affordable phones with cameras, and the opening up of traditional media platforms. Some of the first accounts of catastrophic events are being captured by everyday observers who know they can find an outlet for sharing what they know and witness.

Newspapers and magazines are employing the developing power of the Internet and cellular phones to connect with their audiences, creating a more back and forth relationship with readers. When news breaks, a witness can snap a photo with a cellular

phone and send it in to the local newspaper contributing to their coverage. Or at the end of an editorial, a paper can include an email address for feedback or a Web address where a poll is housed. A magazine can pose a question to its readers and they can answer it online or through a text message. These uses are continually expanding and, as Dan Gillmor writes, "If contemporary American journalism is a lecture, what it is evolving into is something that incorporates a conversation and a seminar. This is about decentralization" (*Moving Toward Participatory Journalism* 79).

The practice of participatory journalism becomes more accessible as media consumers are able to contribute user-generated content to established publication. Mainstream media outlets are using their websites "to host spaces for user-generated content" (Thurman 154). A study on user-generated content (UGC) collected by mainstream media found that there are seven major "formats for participation: 'Polls', 'Have your says', 'Chat rooms', 'Q&As', 'Blogs with comments enabled', 'Pre-moderated message boards', and 'Post-moderated message boards'" (Thurman 140). Print publications, like newspapers and magazines, as well as strictly online publications also encourage users to submit their photos and videos.

While this participatory format does give a voice to those who have not traditionally contributed to widely distributed media, there is also a sense that professional media outlets are taking advantage of the availability of content to fill a void and the question, "Is the rise of UGC just a way for newspapers to get content produced 'for free'?" is certainly valid (Ornebring 771). This shift towards a more democratic media may be attributed to "technological advances but also by societal challenges and deficits in the current state of institutionalized journalism" (Domingo et al. 330). People find

ways to adapt available technologies to fill a need or a hole left by financial troubles that continue to impact the journalism industry. User-generated content is a way for companies to "(re)engage their audiences and cutting costs by "crowdsourcing" tasks that were formerly performed by paid professionals" (Domingo et al. 331).

Not all UGC is aimed at contributing to professional publications and it should be noted that there are some fuzzy areas between what is intended for the world to see and what people intend to keep for themselves or their own personal networks. There are "many forms of UGC production not concerned with documenting or commenting on the public domain, but rather on the personal or *private* domain (videos and pictures of family members, blogs used as diaries documenting everyday life, etc.)" (Ornebring 775). There is still a sense that "private citizens" can comment on the public and that those comments would be considered public, but when these same people comment on their private lives it is still considered "part of *personal and everyday life-oriented*" production (Ornebring 775).

### ***Media Literacy***

Acknowledging that the daily consumption of media in some form or another is almost unavoidable, media consumers should be prepared with the tools to decipher and decode the messages they receive. Perhaps the best place for this education should be in a formal school setting. Students cannot be taught how to handle technology that has not been developed yet, but they can learn some of the fundamental skills of understanding and evaluating media. The lessons on how to understand the media is commonly referred to as media literacy. The term refers "to the process of critically analyzing and learning to create one's own messages in print, audio, video and multimedia" (Hobbs 16).

As Carmen Luke writes:

In the broadest sense, media literacy aims to make students critical and selective viewers, able to reflect critically on media messages, and to use those critical skills in the production of their own print and audio-visual texts. Analytical skills are meant to interrupt students' unreflective acceptance of media's 'public pedagogies', and to develop new strategies for thinking about the meanings media transmit, and the meanings viewers construct for themselves. (2)

Media literacy lessons are relatively new and, as Renée Hobbs discusses in her article "The Seven Great Debates in the Media Literacy Movement," there is some confusion as to the purpose and direction of the teachings. She writes, "the diversity of approaches, philosophies, and goals may be the inevitable result of an emerging field, at the intersection of media studies and education" (17).

The existing literature demonstrates that there is a reason to assist media consumers with understanding and decoding media because of how meanings, particularly meanings related to the construction of gender for this study, are created. The next chapter will discuss the research methodology chosen to perform this study.

### Chapter 3: Research Methodology

For this study, I wanted to get a better understanding of the news-related media content being provided to adolescents in a school setting. I first looked at a broad range of potential news sources including Channel One, a daily television broadcast produced for high-school classrooms, student-run newspapers and other teen-focused publications. I narrowed my focus by choosing two print news publications that are both geared towards high-school students, distributed in an educational setting, and run by larger professional news organizations: *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* and *The Mash*.

The primary features these newspaper-style publications share is that they are print products operating under major news organizations and are intended for use by high school students, distributed on school property, and printed only during the school year.

*TheMash* is a tabloid-format paper owned by the Tribune Company and produced by the Chicago Tribune's *RedEye* staff. Its staff of regular contributors is composed of local high school students. It is published weekly and distributed to Chicago high schools each Thursday. Current advertising material boasts a weekly distribution to 130 high schools in the Chicago Public Schools system with a readership of 75,000 students. The paper is available to students free of charge. The paper's website describes it as being "here to serve you, the Chicago high school reader." It offers local, national, and world news as well as feature and opinion pieces.

*The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*, which is published by *The Wall Street Journal*, is printed one time a month and has a national distribution. The paper's

website details its audiences of 5,000 teacher subscribers, a monthly distribution of 150,000 copies and a readership of 700,000. It is available on a subscription basis and is designed for in-class use with an accompanying website providing educators with ideas for lessons and projects. The editorial content is largely made up of articles from *The Wall Street Journal* that are “reworked and repackaged for a younger audience” (Donaton 15). It offers primarily national and business-focused content from, as its promotional website notes, “one of the most trusted resources in the world” (classroomedition.com).

The reason I chose these two publications is because they are both written for and solely distributed in high schools and managed by larger, well-established media companies. I also think that the difference in the length of time each has been in existence makes them a good choice for my study for the sake of comparison and of contrast. *The Mash* is the newer of the two, now in only its second year of publication, while *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* has been publishing since 1991. When *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* was started, the paper’s general manager, Thomas Baker, stated, “The main benefit to the *Journal* is future readership development. We would like to see people reading newspapers, and if it’s the *Journal*, so much the better,” (Donaton 15). The same can be assumed for *TheMash* in that the Tribune Company is trying to establish readership with it at an early age, or more specifically the high school years, and then continuing that readership with *RedEye* in early adulthood, and finally into the more traditional *Chicago Tribune*.

Not only are they different in the length of their existence, they are also different in that *TheMash* is distributed in schools yet out of the classrooms, so it depends on students to seek it out and pick it up on their own, while *The Wall Street Journal*

*Classroom Edition* is intended for in-class, educational usage and students would most likely have it handed to them by an educator.

I began by requesting two months worth of issues, covering September and October 2009, from each of the publications. For *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*, this meant two issues. For *TheMash*, this meant eight issues. While requesting these issues, I asked for three copies of each. Once I collected all of the copies, I separated them into three identical sets, each set containing two issues of *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* and eight issues of *TheMash*, and I placed the sets in marked envelopes. My intention was for one set of the copies to be used for coding, one set of the copies to remain unmarked and used for scanning purposes if needed, and the final set to be a sort of insurance for each of the other two sets.

I then started coding. I began the process with an open mind, first reading all of the issues in my data set for a general overview. It was at this point when I realized that I had chosen too large of a data set for the scope of my study. This problem manifested itself as I was reading the eight copies of *TheMash*. It became apparent that the issues were rather formulaic and that I had an abundance of pages to code that were very similar to each other. My data set was also unbalanced with a four to one ratio between the two publications and I realized that if I kept it as it was I would be spending a large portion of my time on one publication. I reconfigured my data set, equalizing it by reducing it to two issues of *TheMash*, which aligned with the two issues of *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*. I selected one issue of *TheMash* from September and one from October.

The total number of pages in the data set is 92. The smallest issues contain 20 pages, which are both issues of *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*, and the largest issue contains 28 pages, which is the September 17, 2009 issue of *TheMash*. The October 1, 2009 issue of *TheMash* in the data set contains 24 pages.

After resizing my data set, I returned to coding without a pre-assigned coding system, following the guidance of Robert Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen who encourage a coder to be aware that as "you read through your data, certain words, phrases, patterns of behaviors, subjects' ways of thinking, and events repeat and stand out" (171). I read through my data set and let some of these items reveal themselves as I started to mentally draw connections. I had an idea that I was going to be focusing on gender, but I didn't know in what capacity until I did this coding. It became apparent to me that I could code for gender in several different ways, but I still did not want to limit myself by narrowing my study too soon.

I began doing the coding during another reading of the data set with a blue-ink pen, freely coding things that stuck out to me. I noted the editorial and the advertorial content. I summarized articles in a word or phrase. I noted the topics of the stories, the products of advertisements, and the ways that design was used in a story. I marked up the visual images, making notes of what was being included, the male to female ratio in pictures, the racial images, the appearances of people, the basic messages being conveyed. I noted any stereotyped portrayals. I underlined the names of sources in stories. I noted particular uses of language, including professional terminology, slang, and text-message code. I made marks commenting on the designs of the pages, paying attention to the layout and the prominence of some items over others.



After going through my data set twice making notes on different aspects of the content, I made a list of codes. This included numbers, letters and symbols, which I then tried applying to an issue in the data set. It became evident that this was not going to be very effective and was more cumbersome than it was helpful. So, I returned with simpler and more obvious codes: Male, Female, and Unsure. I went through the data set and marked up images, bylines, and references in stories. I also noted a one-word descriptor when possible under Male and Female such as “athlete”, “mother”, “professional,” “student,” etc. It was during this coding that I started seeing some real discrepancies in how the different sexes were represented and how gender was conveyed. After I had marked up each of the issues, I went back and did a tally on the top of each page. I noted how many males were included, how many females were included, how many were undecipherable, and how each was used. An example tally read, “5 males mentioned in story with names. 1 female mentioned as ‘his wife’ and no name given. Byline lists 1 female professional writer.” Or, “16 females listed as weekly contributors. 2 males listed as weekly contributors.” Where more detail was available for the tallies, it was included: “6 males included (5 subjects, 1 source) and 2 females (1 subject, 1 source).” I also went back with pink, blue, and yellow colored pencils drawing circles next to names or notations coding the sexes, but that proved to not be helpful.

The findings are presented thematically in the next chapter, based on the coded and categorized data.

## Chapter 4: Findings

In the first part of the findings for this study, I will cover general issues about the publications in my data set in terms of how they are presented to and influenced by the intended audience. I will discuss the similarities and differences in typical elements of print publications as related to my data set. This discussion will cover how language is used, communication between a publication and its readers, visual design, and the publications' editorial and advertorial content. In the second part, I will discuss representations of gender in my data set, focusing on the gender portrayals of women. This discussion will cover the how the majority of contributors are women, the unbalanced way that women are profiled in editorial pieces and, finally, examine images of gender in advertising in the data set.

### **Publication Components**

Publications create their content with specific audiences in mind. In an attempt to connect with their intended readers, a publication can tailor its language, its design, and its advertorial and editorial content. *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* and *TheMash* each make distinct efforts to reach their high school aged readership.

#### ***Language***

The language used in a publication is indicative of the intended audience. I will discuss how the language used matches the tone of each publication. In *TheMash* the language is very conversational and fun, utilizes teen lingo and slang, and conveys the idea that the publication is written by teens for teens. In *The Wall Street Journal*

*Classroom Edition*, the language is more formal and direct, with a tone of professionalism.

The data set selected for this study illustrates a wide variety of language levels. At one end of the spectrum is a conversational and teen-level use of language. At the other end lies a formal usage of language traditionally utilized in news publications and other professional writings. The former likely reiterates the notion that *TheMash* is aiming to connect with its readers on a peer level while the latter is a more traditional writer-to-reader way of writing. *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* remains closely linked with *The Wall Street Journal* and they are likely trying to uphold a certain level of formality and professionalism in writing.

*The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* presents its stories in a straightforward manner with a direct style of writing. It does not rephrase a source's quote because it uses a higher level of language, such as "It's a shift of unbridled consumption to conservatism, unbridled luxury to affordable luxury,' he said," which came from a story about the country's current economic situation and a shifting of priorities. Other phrases and words at this level include "mitigate," "domestic wealth creation," "American exceptionalism," and "cost-benefits analysis." These are not typical phrases in teen dialect and give the idea that in this publication teenage readers are being talked to as adults.

In *TheMash*, the language is much more colloquial, casual, and geared towards appealing to a teenage audience. Stories and words in the publication's design and articles assume a youthful and less professional voice. In several instances, questions posed to the reader begin with the word "Wanna," as opposed to "Would you like to." A

review of a new product boasts that it “has a bigger screen, microphone, and, awesomely, a built-in video camera. It has an FM radio, too, so you can tune into Mancow or WGCI and tune out bus passengers (or annoying people in your car).” Words like “awesomely” or references to a popular radio show host or station are read in the same way that a teenager might talk.

*TheMash* also does not define people or objects that might be unfamiliar to a reader outside of its targeted local teen audience, like Mancow, T-Pain, Dr. Dre, or an unconventional use of the word “fierce.” It makes the assumption that its readers do not need an explanation of who these people are or how certain words are used.

Similar to its unapologetic use of pop culture references, *TheMash* also utilizes a considerable amount of text-messaging language and does not decode it for a wider audience. As part of the masthead, a common feature in print publications that lists its leadership, contact information, and factual details, *TheMash* includes the following with its general email address for reader feedback: “TTYL! :)”.<sup>1</sup> This is a widely accepted but untraditional abbreviation and emoticon in text-messaging language that means “Talk to you later” and expresses a smile.

This abbreviated style of writing is used in several places where teens are being quoted, namely the “Sound Off” feature in each issue. Readers are encouraged to write messages that can be “sent” to their friends by way of the paper. Examples of the language used include one from a student at Chicago Military Academy-Bronzeville to his classmates. He writes, “2 all da 2010 SENioRZ WHo Stuck 2getha at B-Ville 4Rm da START ,LetZ make dis YR 1 2 RememBer!” which is read as “To all the 2010 seniors

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<sup>1</sup> All punctuation, capitalization, and other emphases in direct quotations are in original sources.

who stuck together at Bronzeville from the start. Let's make this year one to remember.” Another message from a student addresses a returning teacher saying, “welcome back mz williams hope u have a ‘great year’. ‘we missed u’ok...”.

The formal and comparatively elevated language used in *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* contrasts to the playful, teen-focused language that *TheMash* employs. Each language style complements the overall tone of its publication. The content in *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* directly address topics like the economy, investment decisions, and shifts in the marketplace with its traditional and widely accepted language while *TheMash* uses a more youthful and freer language as it covers lighter pop-culture and locally based subjects, with the exception being occasional news coverage it aggregates from other sources and keeps at a formal level matching the topic, such as the beating death of a local student.

The ways that language is used seems indicative of how the publication wants to connect with its audience. While *TheMash* appears to be trying to connect to its readers on a peer level, the language style can also be attributed to the associated student staff. It is hard to imagine a professional publication permitting the usage of the text-style words, like in the “Sound Off” section, on a regular basis. This language style is probably intended to be more attractive to teenage readers, so that they see a reflection of themselves in the publication. However, it is troublesome that this type of writing, with its disregard for correct capitalization, spelling, and punctuation is given such prominence and gets repeatedly validated through the publication. The language used in *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* is more typical of a professional publication. Although the content may be repackaged for a younger audience, the language does not

appear to be altered in an attempt to connect with them. This is consistent with the conservative and professional demeanor of *The Wall Street Journal* itself. When compared, the language in *The Mash* seems cheap and almost goofy, possibly detrimental to the audience's perception of the publication.

### ***One-Way Versus Two-Way Communication***

The simplest purpose of any publication is to communicate something. Publications, in print or online, can take a multitude of forms and serve many audiences, but all of them are meant to inform in one way or another. Newspapers usually provide a way for readers to respond to what has been published including, but not limited to a phone number for feedback and a "letters to the editor" feature. Because of ever-expanding technology, the channels readers can use to respond have grown to include online feedback forms, emails, message boards and text messages. Publications can choose to use these options or devise their own ways of utilizing technology. The two publications in the data set of this study handle this available technology in different ways: *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* remains relatively traditional, keeping its communication primarily in a singular direction, while *TheMash* employs the Internet and cellular technology to foster two-way communication with its readers.

These two publications treat their readers differently in terms of a conversation. *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* follows a traditional newspaper route of one-way communication. The editorial content is meant to engage readers through what it offers on that page, a professionally written story with accompanying photos, graphics, and sidebar stories where appropriate. It is a contained item. Dissimilarly, *TheMash* devotes a considerable amount of space to trying to spark a back-and-forth exchange with

readers. In the two issues in the data set, there are 22 instances where readers are encouraged to provide feedback. The publication makes reference to its website where readers can leave their own thoughts on a story or topic, respond, answer questions, and contribute.

*The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* includes some feedback from its audience within its pages, but comparatively it is very limited. There are no attempts to dialogue with the audience or to use readily available technology, like the Internet for feedback. When readers are referred to the website, it is only for them to get more from the publication, not contribute to it. On the third page of the September issue, readers are offered additional information by a line that reads, “For a list of business and brands mentioned in this month’s Classroom Edition, visit [wsjclassroom.com](http://wsjclassroom.com).” This is not a means of advertising. Instead, it is a service for readers, giving them a way to easily learn about these companies. In a feature that largely displays brief quotations from various stories, there is a tagline under the headline that reads, “Visit [wsjclassroom.com/quote](http://wsjclassroom.com/quote) to read the stories behind these words.” At the end of the longer stories in the data set issues, a red box with the word “Links” offers readers the chance to “READ MORE MEDIA ARTICLES at [wsjclassroom.com/links](http://wsjclassroom.com/links).” The type of articles being promoted, which are media focused in this instance, changes based on the content of the article that the information box accompanies. Readers are also referred to the website for full versions of stories or reviews, which one can assume were cut for the sake of space in the print publication.

Unlike *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*, *TheMash* repeatedly promotes a back-and-forth dialogue of sorts that it is trying to achieve by encouraging readers to go

online to their website and contribute. With an increased use of the Internet for collecting user-generated content, it has become an accepted industry standard to reverse publish readers' submissions, which means that something that has been submitted to a publication via the Internet or another channel such as a text message can be used in the print version of the publication. It is a cost-effective way to connect with an audience.

A feature on the cover of each issue of *TheMash* is the word Thursday, which is when the weekly publication is distributed, the date of issue, and three phrases stacked right underneath in all capital letters: "YOUR PICS, YOUR COMMENTS, YOUR LIFE." It makes the statement that the publication is very interested in its readers and their contributions. Front-page headlines also reinforce this notion: "Play football? You could be a star," promoting a contest featuring local teen athletes. Another headline reads "Overbooked?" The question mark featured at the end of that word is meant to engage readers, essentially asking "Are you overbooked?" in reference to overuse of Facebook, with a secondary line reading "PLUS: You might be addicted to Facebook—read more."

In addition to the word "You" being used repeatedly, readers of *TheMash* are asked for their input over and over again. A standing second-page feature, called "Mashstar of the week," gives a chosen reader the spotlight with a brief question and answer piece and a headshot of them. At the end of each "Mashstar" piece, a call to action reads, "Wanna be a Mashstar? Go to [themash.com](http://themash.com) and fill out our questionnaire and you, too, might be in the paper next week." On the next page in each issue, which lists the student contributors, readers are asked, "Wanna join the team? Visit [themash.com](http://themash.com) for details." Readers are also encouraged to submit their own photos for the "Snaps" photo gallery, which is displayed as a full-page collage of readers' photos. After



a debate-style piece where two student writers each share their thoughts on an issue, such as “Should teens have jobs during the school year?” or “Is Twitter scary or cool?” readers are asked to share their feedback in two ways, “Who convinced you? Text ‘Naomi’ or ‘Hannah’ to 87708. Do you have an after school job or is hitting the books enough for you? Email us at [themash@tribune.com](mailto:themash@tribune.com).” The “Chatter” column asks readers to email the staff if they want to be a part of the “mouthing off.” There are also several advice-oriented regular features that ask to hear from readers, “Need answers? From dating advice to stress relief...E-mail your questions to [themash@tribune.com](mailto:themash@tribune.com)” or “Do you have questions for TheMash’s career columnist? Email them to [themash@tribune.com](mailto:themash@tribune.com).”

Whether soliciting pictures from readers, asking them to share their questions or opinions, or wanting their feedback, *TheMash* continually makes the effort to establish a conversation with its audience. With a staff comprised mainly of students, the calls for reader feedback and involvement communicate the idea of a teen-to-teen conversation. Reasons for this could include increasing the attractiveness of the newspaper to its audience, repeatedly establishing that it is a product with its audience in mind and encouraging adolescent readers to take a copy from the distribution points. Alternatively, the constant call for user-generated content and feedback could just be a convenient way to fill space.

*The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* does not employ the use of newer technologies to foster a back and forth conversation with its readers. It is very traditional in the way that it appears as a definitive source, not needing any input from its audience. This is a lost opportunity to appeal to its teenage audience. Today’s teens are used to being contributors and having their say, most often by way of the Internet. The fact that

*The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* is not asking readers for their contributions maintains the traditional idea that a newspaper is an authority, rather than a source for collaborative information.

### ***Visual Design***

These two tabloid-format publications utilize an exaggerated, in-your-face style of design. As a result, stories and images grab a potential reader's attention. Large fonts and bright colors are used in a lively manner even in serious stories. The covers of each of the four issues in the data exemplify this loud style and the difference.

*The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* is more conservative with a relatively standard title bar across the top, which uses the same logo as its parent paper, *The Wall Street Journal*, and a small red bar beneath noting that it is the "Classroom Edition". Each cover features one main story in a large space, covering almost four-fifths of the space. Along the right side are four images promoting other stories in the issue. But the focus is clearly on the primary story being featured.

In one of the issues, a story about the impact of the recession on indoor shopping centers is billed with a strong statement headline in two-inch letters adorned with graphical spider webs reading, in all capital letters, "THE MALL IS DEAD." (See Figure 1.) That dramatic headline and the way it is displayed is intended to grab a reader's attention rather than to really provide information about the story. A smaller secondary headline actually lets the reader know that the story is about the impact of the economic recession on retail shopping malls.

Figure 1: Cover of *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* Featuring Article on Malls



Source: *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*, October 2009: 1.

Another issue of *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* uses the same large amount of space for a photo of a relatively non-descript student from the back with his hand on his head and body language that speaks of confusion. (See Figure 2.) He is alone in front of a building that would fit in on any college campus. In three pennants are three words that all begin with D: Dreams, Debts, Decisions. Below that reads, “Is an elite college education worth the cost?” Drawing readers in with an “everyman” and “everywhere” sort of image paired with a question that a high school student could be asking him or herself, this cover engages a potential reader through a personal connection.

Figure 2: Cover of *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* Featuring Article on College Decisions



Source: *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*, September 2009: 1.

*TheMash* begins its loud design style with its title bar. The word “the” appears in a small, uppercase font and is backed by the word “mash,” which is much larger and in all lowercase letters. Only these lowercase letters are massive, covering almost a quarter of the front page and stretching all the way from one margin to the other. The colors used are a bright orange and white and the contradiction of the lowercase letters being so large has a whimsical feeling to it.

The covers of *TheMash* in the data set feature teens in close-up photos cropped so tightly that they fill up the entire space and appear to almost be coming off the page. One of the covers is a photo illustration of a girl looking over her shoulder with a surprised expression on her face. (See Figure 3.) She is working on a laptop computer displaying a screen from the social-networking site Facebook while small Facebook icons with wings are circling her head. The perspective of someone holding the issue makes it look like he or she just encountered and interrupted this girl from her online socializing. The closely cropped image is so tight that only the subject’s back, shoulder, and head are visible. The image of her with the superimposed Facebook icons circling her head is so large that it

covers up half of the title bar at the top of the page so that the “a,” “s,” and “h” in the words “the” and “mash” are not visible.

Figure 3: Cover of *TheMash* Featuring Article on Overuse of Facebook



Source: *TheMash*, 1 October 2009: 1.

The second issue of *TheMash* in the data set shows a female adolescent with a concerned look on her face stares into the camera, while over her shoulder a male adolescent peers above his sunglasses and sneers, showing false vampire fangs. (See Figure 4.) The headline reads, “Bite club” in big letters with a secondary headline saying, “Teens are suckers for vampires—and not just ‘Twilight’.” The image of the two people is cropped tight, their outside shoulders not even in the frame and their heads appearing in front of the title bar of the paper. This is perhaps to give the reader an up-close and almost intimate perspective and makes him or her feel connected to the paper as opposed to the more removed and distant perspective used on the covers of *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* in the data set.

Figure 4: Cover of *TheMash* Featuring Vampire Article



Source: *TheMash*, 17 September 2009: 1.

All of the covers in the data set engage the reader, or potential reader, before he or she even opens the issue. This attention-grabbing style seems to be geared towards teens and is carried throughout the issues. *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* uses its design, images, and headlines to promote itself by informing the potential reader about a variety included in the issue. They use the space to show the variety of the topics included in their coverage. *TheMash*, however, uses its covers to grab readers with a more dynamic design. There is a sense of chaos that brings the reader into the issue and its playful design is consistent with the publications language style, intended to connect with adolescents on a level with which they are comfortable, familiar.

### ***Editorial Content***

In this section, I will examine the editorial content that each publication has chosen to include. I will discuss how this content varies between the two publications despite the similarities in their intended audiences. I will present examples of each paper and discuss the chosen subject matters.

These two publications geared for teenage readers vary in the scope of their editorial content. Even though they share the same audience in terms of age, the subjects covered suggest differences in the intended readership. *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* primarily covers national news with an economic focus. *TheMash* takes a much more localized approach, focusing on the city of Chicago and nearby suburbs, area news, student life, events, schools, and athletics. There is also an emphasis on entertainment and feature pieces as opposed to hard news.

Closely associated with *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* includes editorial content with a strong economic focus. For example, the two cover stories, “Dreams, Debts, and Decisions,” a piece debating the worth of attending an elite university, and “The Mall is Dead,” an article about the decline of big shopping centers, discuss the topics in terms of money. Other stories in the data set discuss marketing, fraud, the U.S. space program, bank fees, homeless tent camps, and business-minded personal profiles.

*TheMash* issues in the data set include a cover story on the current vampire trend in entertainment and teens overuse of social networking sites like Facebook. These lead stories are highly teen-focused and use a younger and personal perspective as opposed to a business-minded perspective. Other stories in the data set cover local football games, tips on academic success, profiles of student athletes, a profile of Drew Barrymore, movie and television show reviews, technology reviews, local entertainment and news events, first-person accounts of visits to local colleges, and romantic advice. The issues also include a page dedicated solely to games ranging from a numbers-based game called

Sudoku, which can be challenging, to a connect-the-dots activity, which seems to be at a juvenile level too young for most teenagers, but may provide some time-wasting activity.

*The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* is distributed on a subscription basis. It is used in classrooms and is likely worked into the curriculum, so it seems logical that the editorial content would be of a more serious nature. Educators would be responsible for the subscription and the in-classroom distribution, justifying the cost by using it as an educational tool. The publication still needs to resonate with the students who will read it, but it does not rely on these readers going out of their way to pick it up because it will be assigned to them. Dissimilarly, *TheMash* and its no-cost model rely on individuals to actually pick up its issues from distribution spots. It is not handed out in classes and is not likely used in classroom activities. Knowing that, it likely makes every effort to appeal to students through its design and editorial content. It needs to grab potential readers' attention by featuring articles that would appeal to a teen population in an engaging design.

## **Representations of Gender**

The second section of my findings will center on representations of gender and stereotyping. I will discuss how gender is represented in the data set, differences between the representations of gender used in the editorial content, and visual representations of gender in advertising. The data set chosen for this research illustrates a noticeable lack of balance between sexes and an abundance of stereotypical representations. This unbalance is evident in both publications and in multiple areas including the article writers, sources quoted in articles, how sources are noted, and visual representations in both editorial and



advertorial areas. There exists a discord in that females are more significant contributors, yet males are more positively represented.

### *Authors*

This section will take a quantitative look at the authors credited with articles in the data set, focusing on the breakdown of males and females.<sup>2</sup> This split becomes more interesting when paying attention to the topics of the articles that these authors have written. The larger percentage of writers, which is female, writes primarily about males.

Of the bylined stories in the data set, eighteen were written by males, forty were written by females and five are attributed to writers with names that are indistinguishable in terms of gender. (See Table 1.) This total does not reflect the breakdown in each publication as *TheMash* is considerably more unbalanced in terms of the gender split. A survey of articles from *TheMash* demonstrates that there are a larger number of female contributors with twenty-four articles written by females, while a male wrote only one. Three of the bylines are indistinguishable in terms of gender. In *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* issues from the data set, sixteen articles were written by females, seventeen articles were written by males, and two bylines are indistinguishable in terms of gender. (See Table 1.)

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<sup>2</sup> The term “bylined articles” that is being used pertains to articles with one or two names directly attached to them. Articles with names that do not clearly identify the sex of the writer(s) are referred to as “non-distinguishable by byline”. Also, under this title are articles that list a staff byline such as “Mash staff”. Unattributed articles are not considered.

Table 1: Authorship of Articles in Data Set Broken Down by Male and Female Bylines

Publication and issue date	Female bylines	Male bylines	Undistinguishable	Total number of bylined articles
<i>TheMash</i> , 9/17/09	11	1	2	14
<i>TheMash</i> , 10/1/09	13	0	1	14
<i>The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition</i> , 9/2009	6	7	1	14
<i>The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition</i> , 10/2009	10	10	1	21
Total number of bylines by each sex	40	18	5	63

Sources: *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*, September 2009. *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*, October 2009. *TheMash*, 17 September 2009. *TheMash*, 1 October 2009.

Reviewing the tallies, there are over twice as many female bylined writers in the data set than there are males. Taking the tally split between the two publications into consideration, it is interesting to note that for the student-staffed paper, the overwhelming majority of the writers are female and that the division between the sexes almost evens with the professional publication.

### ***Sources***

This section will discuss how sources quoted in articles favor males over females. My research shows that sources quoted<sup>3</sup> in the data set articles are primarily male and that they tend to be quoted for their expertise while females are quoted in more anecdotal and emotional ways.

“The Mall is Dead,” a cover article from *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*, presents a striking example of this disparity through the way in which nine individuals are quoted. Of these nine quotations, seven are attributed to males, two are

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<sup>3</sup> The term “sources quoted” is being used strictly for individuals who are specifically named and cited with a direct quotation. It is not being used for individuals that are paraphrased or mentioned.

attributed to females, and one is attributed to an individual with a gender-neutral name (See Table 2). The names of the males quoted in the piece are given along with their titles: “Green Street analyst Jim Sullivan,” “Michael Glimcher, CEO of Glimcher Realty Trust,” “Burt P. Flickinger III, managing director of Strategic Resource Group,” “Penney CEO Myron ‘Mike’ Ullman III,” “Saks CEO Stephen Sadove,” “Carl Steidtmann, chief economist at Deloitte,” “Whichard asset manager Kenneth Whichard” and “Charlotte City Councilman John Lassiter.”

There are two females quoted in the article are shoppers or consumers: Edith Schilla and Mary Kate Cline. Unlike the males, the females are listed with their ages, 45 and 51, and they are not referenced with any sort of professional title. Their comments revolve around emotion rather than facts or expertise. Schilla is quoted saying, “So sad!” in an online comment she left about a Sears’ liquidation sale she recently saw. Cline is quoted talking about a now-defunct mall with a weightless quote: “‘It was just a great place to go and be seen,’ says Mary Kate Cline, 51, who frequented the mall.”

The indistinguishable name in terms of gender is Luz Pavas, a kiosk owner who is quoted about not wanting to relocate. An age or professional title is not mentioned.

Table 2: Quoted Sources in “The Mall is Dead.” *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*.

Categories of quoted sources	Female	Male	Undistinguishable
Quoted as an expert or professional	0	8	0
Quoted anecdotally or emotionally	2	0	1
Quoted with a professional title	0	8	0
Quoted with an age	2	0	1

Source: *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*, October 2009: 6-7.

Other stories in *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* demonstrate the same unbalance in terms of gender. A story about the U.S. space program quotes zero females and three males: a United States senator, a futurist, and the head of Boeing's manned space programs. A story about the company Netflix quotes two men and zero women. A story about bank fees quotes two men and zero women. A story about dentists having to market their work quotes three men and zero women. A story about a new detergent brand quotes two males and one female. And a story about personal spending quotes four males, all for their expertise. One female, the founder of a research group, is quoted for her expertise and another is quoted anecdotally as a recovering spendthrift.

Combining the findings about the sexes of the bylined authors with the findings of how males and females are used as sources, it seems incongruent that the majority of the writers are women, but the majority of professional sources are men. This means that the overall trend in the data set is for female writers to refer to male sources for information. But, when a story or an anecdote is needed, women are asked. The stereotype revealed in this realization is that for the facts, a male in a position of authority or leadership should be used as a source.

### *Subjects*

Another imbalance occurs in the frequency and in the way that women are profiled in editorial pieces. They are not equally represented and when they are focused upon, there is mention of their gender, something that is not noted in profiles of males.

In the September 17 issue of *TheMash*, under the headline "Hispanic Pioneers" is a page celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month, which the paper says runs from September 15 to October 15 in 2009 and that it "will honor by featuring profiles of Hispanics who

have accomplished great goals and made history.” The reader is lead to believe that these profiles will appear in the four issues that will be published in the month-long celebration. In the September 17 issue there are two males honored: Juanes, a popular, young, musician who gives time and money to various causes including his own foundation for victims of land mines in Columbia and Juan Espana, a hard-working Mexican immigrant who supports his family financially and emotionally. In neither of these pieces is their gender mentioned or dwelled upon and the only females on the page are the names of the two student writers that authored the articles and two women assumed to be Espana’s wife and daughter in a photograph of a quinceanera celebration.

In the second issue of *TheMash* in the data set, which with an October 1 publication date still falls in Hispanic Heritage Month, the profiles honoring Latinos are missing. On page 7, which is where the profiles appeared in the previous issue, is a news story about the recent beating death of a local high school student by other teens. It is assumed that the profiles for Hispanic Heritage Month were discontinued.

However a profile of a woman that does appear in the October 1 issue focuses on Drew Barrymore, a 34-year-old actress and first-time film director. The piece talks about her youth, her movie career, and her new film, “Whip It,” the story of a young girl and her roller derby team. The explanation of what Barrymore was trying to accomplish in her new film alludes to the fact that in order for a film about women to be important or validated, it has to make strides, prove something or make a statement. Student reporter Emily Selch writes, “Barrymore didn’t just want to make a film about rock-‘em-sock-‘em roller babes. She wanted to create a film that said something profound.” And later, “The movie tackles very feminine issues. There is an underlying tone of women’s

empowerment. As Barrymore puts it, ‘I love when girls get to do what boys do. I love to empower women. I don’t like cattiness. I like girls who can do what boys do without being man-haters.’”

*TheMash* also includes two profiles of teenage girls and focuses on their Internet usage, particularly their overuse of the social networking site Facebook. In the articles, the girls are overwhelmed by the sites and their attempt to not use them, struggling to distance themselves from keeping up with everything going on in the lives of their friends.

Unlike the profile of Barrymore, which draws attention to her gender, the profiles of males, which appear in both *TheMash* and *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* make no mention of gender. Instead, these profiles focus only on accomplishments and personal details. These profiles in *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* include the Founder and CEO of Netflix, Kobe Bryant and his work in China, a Peace Corps international relief worker who heads a mission in Afghanistan, and the head of Best Buy’s Geek Squad. These profiles of males in *TheMash* include the singer and the father mentioned above, a high school football star and soccer star.

The variation between the profiles of men and women in the data set highlights the utilization of stereotypes. The girls who are profiled in the social media piece come across as being overwhelmed, unable to handle the temptation of gossip and connecting with their friends. Facebook is not only used by girls, but these pieces are very one-sided and carry a “damsel in distress” tone. When actress Drew Barrymore makes a film, the fact that it is about women is noted. Although she says she is trying to achieve a female-power sort of film, the quotes from Barrymore contribute to the stereotypes of women

having to make a point to appear strong and that a film about women has to make an effort to be profound.

The profiles of men in the data set focus on achievement, on financial success, on impacting the world through professional work or volunteerism. And, none of this dwells on the fact that they are men. Unlike with positive pieces about women where their gender is highlighted as if it is notable that they accomplished things in spite of the fact that they are women, the articles of men just focus on their accomplishments or positive contributions to society.

### ***Visual Representations In Editorial***

Throughout the editorial parts of the newspaper issues in the data set, images are used to illustrate the various features. In some instances, the images are of the people or being talked about or quoted in a story. In others instances, the images are of the subject being quoted in the piece. In this section, I am going to examine the percentages of men and women visually depicted in the data set.

On the four covers of the issues in the data set, there are three females pictured and five males. (See Figures 1-4). The pictures of three females show them looking at the camera. One girl on the cover of *TheMash* looks over her shoulder at the camera in a surprised expression. Another cover of *TheMash*, previously discussed in this study, shows a teenage female being scared or bothered by a male with vampire fangs. The final female seen on the covers in the data set is used to illustrate a piece about how one new college student found that in reality, college is not like it is depicted on television. The image chosen is of an attractive, youthful television star from a television show that is no

longer on the air. She stares directly at the camera wearing a knowing smile and a revealing blouse.

Of the five males pictured on the four covers in the data set, only one is looking at the camera. He is in the aforementioned vampire cover. The other four males on the covers are seen in action. Basketball star Kobe Bryant holds a microphone and addresses a crowd. A soccer player is seen in mid-air executing a kick. A skateboarder is in the middle of a move in a skate park. A faceless male is shown only from the back scratching his head while presumably trying to make a decision about higher education.

The discrepancies on these covers leads to the theory that images of women show them “being,” while images of men show them “doing.” I will now examine editorial images on the inside pages of the issues in my data set to further develop my theory.

On the inside pages of my data set, a total of 197 individuals are pictured in images associated with editorial content.<sup>4</sup> In a nearly even split, 102 of the individuals pictured are female and 95 of the individuals are male. However, the breakdown is much less even when examining how the different sexes are pictured. A majority of the women are seen posing<sup>5</sup> while the men are seen in some sort of action. Some of the images proved indecipherable as to whether the subjects were posing or doing some sort of action. (See Table 3).

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<sup>4</sup> There are some individuals who are pictured but not counted in this number because it was impossible to decipher if they were male or female because of an obstruction or the way in which they were seen in the image. Any image that was questionable is left out of the count.

<sup>5</sup> Images qualifying as “posing” include pictures of people staring straight at the camera along with headshots and mug shots that are used to either accompany a quotation or illustrate a story.



Table 3: How Women and Men are Depicted in Images

Categories of positions in photos	Women	Men
Posing for the camera	70	48
Performing an action	28	42
Not decipherable whether they were posing or performing an action	4	5
Total number of images	102	95

Sources: *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*, September 2009. *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*, October 2009. *TheMash*, 17 September 2009. *TheMash*, 1 October 2009.

### Visual Representations in Advertising

Looking at the images used for advertisements in the data set, a count shows that a total of 127 people are seen. Of the people in the images, 72 are female, 50 are male, and 5 are undecipherable. The majority of the people pictured are female, but the numbers are a bit skewed because one ad in particular showed large groups of girls together, all of whom were counted in the total. If it were not for this ad, the breakdown would have been much closer to even. However, the more evident difference in the images of the advertorial content is the way in which each gender was depicted. In this next section, I will examine the types of images used in advertisements, primarily focusing on females.

The advertising in the data set of these teen-focused publications aims to attract young consumers and primarily utilizes stereotypical images of females to do so. The products being advertised fit into four categories: Entertainment, education, retail clothing stores, and cellular phone service. Exceptions to these categories include a public service announcement for safe driving and a two-page special advertising section about a volunteer initiative between Major League Baseball and Volunteers of America.

In these advertisements, females are portrayed through either highly sexualized images or stereotypically nurturing depictions.

Fashion advertisements in the data set featuring females tend to show them in sexually suggestive positions or clothing. Three fashion ads for clothing lines at Carson Pirie Scott only include women. The two full-page ads feature a total of eight women modeling the clothing. All of the clothing is youthful, fits tight to the models' bodies, and six of the seven women are wearing extremely high-heeled shoes. With the exception of one, all of the models stand with a hip popped and five of the seven stand with their legs apart, suggesting various statements with their body language. One model stands with her toes pointed slightly in, her hip popped, her head tilted, and a hand twirling her hair. She looks confused, indifferent. Another model in the same ad wearing a tight black, strapless dress with a scarf thrown over her shoulder purses her lips and blankly stares to the side. (See Figure 5).

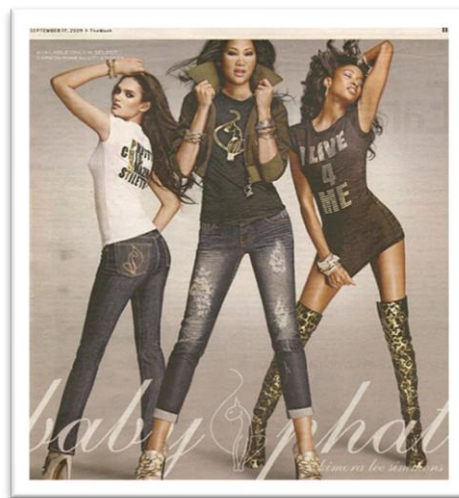
Figure 5: Carson Pirie Scott Advertisement Featuring Deréon Brand Clothing



Source: *TheMash*, 17 September 2009: 10.

In another ad, three models stand within inches of each other. One model is facing backwards while twisting her body, looking over her shoulder at the camera. Her tightly fitted t-shirt features the four words “pretty, chic, amazing and stiletto.” In the same ad, one of the models is only wearing a t-shirt that reads “I LIVE 4 ME” and thigh-high, leopard print boots. Her upper thighs are bare and she is tugging her shirt down with one hand in an apparent effort to cover her pubis region. Her other hand is behind her head, her eyes are closed and her hair is thrown back. The third model stands in the center of the ad in a more direct and powerful stance with her hands flipping up her jacket collar and her eyes looking straight into the camera. (See Figure 6).

Figure 6: Carson Pirie Scott Advertisement Featuring Baby Phat Brand Clothing



Source: *TheMash*, 17 September 2009: 11.

In the third ad, the single model in the shot is on the ground sitting in a reclined position with her legs outstretched and one knee raised. She wears a tight, black, one-shouldered dress featuring silver zippers that run from the bottom of the dress to each of her breasts. She is leaning on one arm while the other is holding the back of her head. She wears a sultry expression with her lips pursed. (See Figure 7). The females in these ads

appear to be selling themselves and the ideas of sexual maturity and mischief along with the clothes.

Figure 7: Carson Pirie Scott Advertisement Featuring Rocawear Brand Clothing



Source: *TheMash*, 17 September 2009: 16.

Advertisements in the data set, including several for Jewel-Osco, a local grocery store and pharmacy chain, appear to be targeting female consumers using less sexual but very stereotyped images. These ads for Jewel-Osco promote the store as a place for locker-decorating supplies and bill it as “Your Homecoming Headquarters.” Another ad for the store features a girl being met at her locker by a letterman-jacket-wearing boy. Another shows a group of five girls dressed for a school dance, with images of make-up, perfume, cameras, flowers, and balloons below. Behind the girls, three boys can be seen smiling along.

Generally speaking, it does not seem likely that a grocery store such as Jewel-Osco would rely on teen consumers for a large portion of sales. However, what these ads appear to doing is building brand awareness and loyalty with this young market and are likely basing their advertising investments on the notion that women do the majority of

grocery shopping for their households. If they can establish a relationship early enough, they may be creating customers who will turn to them later when they are buying food, prescriptions, and other items for their families.

A large two-page special advertisement section in *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* advertises Action Teams, a volunteer initiative between Major League Baseball and Volunteers of America, and uses six photos along with text to make its pitch. But rather than going after males with these professional athletes, the ads seem to be aiming for the female readers and potential volunteers by showing pictures of other young females helping out and caring for others with stereotypical images of nurturing. Despite being funded by Major League Baseball, a male organization with an all-male player line up, the advertisement is dominated by photos of teen girls. These young females are seen posing with professional ball players, walking with work equipment either to or from a volunteer job site, assisting an elderly couple, or playfully posing with a bus loaded with collected donations. The only exceptions are two photos that include male teens marginally appearing towards the edge of the frame. In the entire two-page ad, there are 10 males pictured. One photo is of an elderly gentleman being helped by an elderly female companion and a teenage girl. Five male professional athletes are seen posing for photos. Four male teens are shown either posing for photos with the teenage females and the male athletes or returning from a job site. In comparison, there are 27 female teens shown in this advertisement.

The most striking stereotypical images placing females in nurturing roles can be seen by examining the four advertisements placed by the United States Army for its ROTC program. Each of the issues in the data set contains one full-page advertisement

for the Army with the tagline “Start Strong.” Each of the advertisements clearly focuses on an individual. Three of the four ads center on a male wearing a shirt that reads “ARMY ROTC” in capital letters. In one of the ads, a male carries what looks like a book under his arm and approaches the entrance of an academic-looking building. (See Figure 8).

Figure 8: Advertisement for U.S. Army ROTC Depicting Male Student At School



Source: *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*, September 2009: 20.

Another ad features a male, focused in the photo, and a female, out of focus and partially cropped out, while they look down at a book. (See Figure 9). Their positioning and body language suggest he is teaching her.

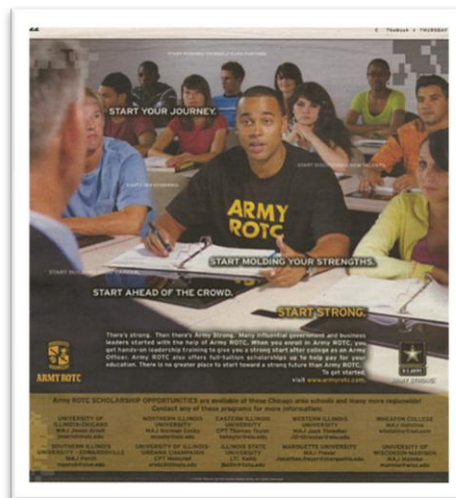
Figure 9: Advertisement for U.S. Army ROTC Depicting Male Assisting Female



Source: *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*, October 2009: 20.

The third advertisement featuring a male shows a student seated in class, his hands slightly raised, engaging with a male teacher while other students either look on or look away seemingly disinterested. (See Figure 10).

Figure 10: Advertisement for U.S. Army ROTC Depicting Male Assisting Female



Source: *TheMash*, 1 October 2009: 22.

The ad with the student in class and the ad with the student approaching an academic building are overlaid with inspirational sentences in varying font sizes.

Examples of these include: “Start majoring in courage.” “Start majoring in leadership.” “Start pushing yourself further.” “Start commanding more attention.” “Start your journey.” “Start ahead of the crowd.” “Start building your career.” “Start molding your strengths.” The statements are more like commands that instruct the reader to focus on oneself, personal achievements, career goals, and self-development.

In contrast to the male-focused ROTC advertisements, the fourth of the series depicts a female. Instead of being faced forward like the others, she is turned to the side, her profile showing a cheery smile. (See Figure 11). She faces a young girl who is smiling back at her. The young girl playfully has the stethoscope in her ears while the adult female has the end of the stethoscope placed over the girl’s heart. Behind the two females, a slightly out-of-focus male looks on and smiles in the direction of what appears to be his daughter.

Figure 11: Advertisement for U.S. Army ROTC Depicting Female as Nurse



Source: *TheMash*, 17 September 2009: 5.



Unlike the other three ads, which mention general ROTC opportunities and scholarships, this one specifically mentions “Army ROTC nursing scholarship opportunities.” Any doubt that the image represents a nurse helping a patient and her father is settled when reading the text stating, “By enrolling in Army ROTC as a nursing student, you will learn valuable leadership skills... After graduation, you will have an opportunity to care for Soldiers and their families as an Army Nurse... And lead others as an Army Officer.” Although it does include the possibility of reaching an officer’s status, the last line reads like an afterthought added at the end for good measure. Unlike the other ads, which have a message of limitless potential, this ad seems to cap achievements at helping soldiers and their families like a member of a support staff.

Also, unlike the ads that feature males, the text that appears over the photo is much less focused on personal gain and excelling. It is more about having the chance to help and nurture *other* people or learn from other people. The statements are not about finding strength from within, like those in the male-focused advertisements. Examples of this include, “Start touching lives.” “Start helping others.” “Start feeling inspired.” “Start making a difference.”

The way that gender is represented in the advertisements of the data set illustrates women into very limited roles either socially or professionally. Men are portrayed in leadership positions, in successful academic or professional roles, or as romantic counterparts to women. Women are portrayed as either extremely sexualized or as caregivers and support staff. They are not accurate reflections of teenage girls, who are the intended audience for the publications.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

One of the commonalities that the two publications in my data set share is the fact that they are trying to connect with an audience that can most accurately be summed up as teenagers in high school. The nationwide distribution of *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* and the citywide distribution of *TheMash* means that they cannot be too focused on accurately connecting with their audiences, which is why they tend to rely on stereotypes.

The publications make efforts to connect with their teenage readers: *TheMash* is primarily written by student staff members who cover age-appropriate and localized topics. They use language typical of teens and they are written in a familiar and friendly tone. *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* focuses more on national and economic topics but sheds some of the formality when covering topics like muscle cars, soccer, and Gatorade's new marketing campaign.

My findings indicate that *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* aims to appeal to male readers, establishing their habits while still in high school so that reading a business-focused paper, similar to *The Wall Street Journal* itself, becomes a part of their daily routine. *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* uses very few images of women, and those they do use are highly stereotypical, both in advertising and editorial areas. The language is business-minded, straightforward and technical. It speaks in a "man-to-man" sort of way. The editorial content relies heavily on profiles of successful men. Other non-profile stories focus on stereotypically masculine topics like business, economy, finance, sports, technology and cars. The tone of the paper is authoritative. It

has a singular direction, speaking to its audience, and remains relatively formal throughout its pages despite the fact that its readership is made up of teenagers. There is no apparent effort to connect with readers on an emotional level and it instead seems to be in pursuit of an almost businesslike relationship.

*TheMash* seems to be trying to appeal primarily to a female audience. The covers in the data set use women as their focus in a stereotypically feminine way. One girl is confused, overwhelmed by social media networks on her computer. The other cover shows a girl being bothered by a boy about her same age. *TheMash* is friendly and familiar. It uses language typical of teens. It features stories about teens. It incorporates images of teens in everyday settings. It also goes to great lengths through user-generated content to use the works and words of its readers. But all these efforts to connect on a peer level do not absolve *TheMash* from employing the use of stereotypical images of gender.

The representations of gender in editorial content are extremely stereotypical in both publications from the already discussed reliance on males for professional or expert quotes in the *Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*'s story "The Mall is Dead," to the image of three daughters cleaning their home while their mom stands in her outdated kitchen that she admittedly wishes to update, while their father—the man of the house—discusses the economics of saving to send his daughters to college.

The same can certainly be said about the stereotypical representations of gender in the advertising content of the data set. The two most indicative examples are the large two-page advertisement for Major League Baseball's volunteer initiative with the help of high school students and the advertisements for the Army's ROTC program. With the

volunteer advertisement, most of the males included in the pictures are professional baseball players. They are there because of their athletic achievements and their involvement with their baseball team. They pose for pictures surrounded by young females who have volunteered their time for the betterment of the community, a stereotypically nurturing and female gesture—working for free for the benefit of others.

Even more dramatic in terms of stereotypical portrayals of gender in advertising from the data set is the example of the four Army ROTC advertisements. Three of the advertisements feature a young male on his way to success through scholastic achievement and affiliation with the Army. They are depicted as leaders, as winners and as very masculine men. On the contrary, the one image of a female stereotypes her as a nurse—warm and nurturing, helping others, content in her role as a caregiver. The message sent is that, at best, to be successful in the army a woman can aspire to be there as support staff. In reality, that is not the case and there are women who rise to admirable ranks in the military. But what they have chosen to advertise is success for females in the form of caring.

Additional examples of the stereotypical gender images are those seen in *TheMash* advertisements for Jewel, a local grocery store. Stereotypically a place where the female leader in a household goes to shop for a family's daily needs, grocery stores are advertised to appeal to women. But these advertisements are not depicting produce, poultry, or bargains. Instead, they are selling romantic notions catering to a female audience. In one image, a teenage girl is met at her locker by a male athlete, who stands taller than her, but close to her in his lettermen's jacket. In another advertisement for the grocery store, a group of happy, smiling girls in brightly colored dresses pose for pictures

before a school dance, surrounded by their male dates. It is a far stretch to see what is really being sold in these two scenarios, but they are trying to appeal to women's desire for romance.

The fashion advertisements in *TheMash* only feature women—highly stereotyped and sexualized women. They are all on display, dressed in tight clothing striking typical poses that fit either into a submissive, “come hither” category or a strong and sexual category. In the submissive images, a head is tilted, hair is being twirled and another model sits on the ground. In the powerful images, the models stand with legs apart, hips popped, staring straight at the camera. But the power they show is not professional or successful. Instead, it is sexual.

The way gender is constructed through stereotypes normalizes the stereotypes so that they appear natural and ordinary. The stereotypical representations confirm or at least continue informing adolescents during this impressionable and foundational time in their lives how society expects them to be. The presence of mass media publications like those in the data set being distributed in a school setting further legitimates the stereotypical messages they create. Educated from the beginning to take as truth what is taught in schools, adolescents have likely not yet developed independent and critical thinking skills to the point where they can isolate and identify these stereotypical gender portrayals. Of course, it is probably incorrect to assume that many adults could or would do that either.

While in-school news publications may provide resources for learning, the unintentional lessons they are teaching should be made apparent to the administrators, teachers and students alike. Perhaps the best purpose publications like these could serve would be when they are teamed with lessons of critical thinking and media literacy. If

they were used for media literacy lessons they may prove to be extremely helpful in teaching adolescents how to be critical and informed media consumers for life.

This data shows that there is a need for critical media literacy in order to assist readers with recognizing and deconstructing the messages that are constructed in the media, particularly in terms of gender. Without recognizing these messages, readers are likely to consider them as norms and adapt their behaviors to follow.<sup>6</sup>

Looking at publications like *TheMash* and *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition*, which are both written and designed for teenage students and distributed in high schools with the administrations consent, it seems logical that high school would be an opportune time for these media literacy teachings. This is something that could be either incorporated into the current curriculum or added as a special project. If this was widely and successfully performed so that the majority of readers became cognizant of the embedded messages, whether they be gender based, racially based, or another type, perhaps a time would come when there would be a forceful demand for balance and fairness in how society is represented.

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<sup>6</sup> Please note that this study did not observe how readers are or are not being taught critical reading and media literacy skills. And this study is not making the assumption that these lessons are not currently being taught in some schools.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this study, I researched the social construction of gender through youth-oriented print media. I used a data set of four issues of two in-school distributed news publications to see how gender is represented in media intended for an audience of teenagers. I found that the stereotypes were much more prevalent than I assumed they would be and that these constructs of gender appear so normal that I probably would not have paid much attention to them without a close examination. First, I return directly to my original research questions and then to implications for further research.

### Contributions of This Research

**What meanings are constructed through the messages conveyed in these types of publications?** These in-school publications, which are each owned and produced by large media corporations, have an immediate legitimization of their content because of their conventional focus. The serious tone of *The Wall Street Journal Classroom Edition* brings with it a weighty sense of importance as it promotes stories of personal success and economic challenges. The relaxed and fun tone of *TheMash* seems to try to keep students engaged by focusing on topics applicable to their world, like social media, trends, fashion, and entertainment. Gendered meanings are also constructed through visual and textual representations of gender in both the editorial and advertorial content.

**How is gender represented?** Gender is represented in highly stereotypical representations. Men are portrayed as leaders, whether academically, athletically, or in the business world. Women are portrayed as followers, as dependents, as nurturers, as

emotional, and as sexual objects. The representations of gender in these publications are very normalized and mainstream.

**Do these types of publications replicate or challenge social stratification?**

Unfortunately, it seems as though these types of publications are not in the business of challenging social stratification and instead repeatedly replicate it. The representations of gender are just one way that these stratifications are replicated. Others include racial and economic. These publications play into the social norm, not challenge it, which is done probably to appeal to as much of their target audience as possible.

**How might they influence students' identities?** Students are supposed to be drawn to these publications that make an effort to look like, talk like, and act like them. While reading these publications meant for them, teens might subconsciously try to fit themselves into the narrowly defined categories that are portrayed in the publications. There is very little, if any, appearance of a counter culture or the notion that these stereotypical representations are limited and limiting. These publications likely maintain the status quo of inequalities in terms of gender, race, and even age.

**How are news events portrayed and what meaning is being assigned by the stories chosen to run?** I found it interesting that very few examples of local, national, and international news items were included in the data set. International news was omitted, except for two stories about the sport of soccer. In national news, which was pretty much absent in *TheMash*, the only stories were about the economy and the impact of the trouble in the financial industry. For local news the only current events news story that ran was a piece following up on the beating death of a Chicago teenager and high school student named Derrion Albert in *TheMash*. Although these publications are



technically “newspapers,” the news they chose to cover is extremely limited. I think the message this gives is that because of their age, the readership does not need to have an awareness of news events.

**What is done to make these publications appeal to students?** The loud and almost whimsical design that is utilized and the light and entertaining stories that are published are both in an effort to appeal to students. The language that is used seems to be tailored for students, even though it is significantly different in both publications. Also, the fact that they are distributed in school makes them convenient and accessible.

**How might students be aware of the societal messages being communicated and how might educators help foster this awareness?** I believe that being educated in media literacy could help give students the proper tools needed to recognize and decode some of the messages of the media. Even something as simple as learning to recognize stereotypes and understand why they are used could be very beneficial. Educators should be sensitive to these messages and do what they can to help students decode what they read or observe whether it is through a formalized media literacy program or just by taking the time to stop and spend some time discussing when the opportunity presents itself.

### **Implications for Further Research**

For further research on this study, I think a project could be done by expanding the data set and adding similar publications, but having a stricter focus on one element of the publications: Images, languages, advertised products, tone, etc. I also think it would be interesting to replicate this study using a similar news publication for grade school

students and university students. It would be interesting to see if there is consistency through the academic levels.

If I were to do this study again, I would definitely try to narrow my focus concentrate on one aspect of the media and how gender is constructed in it. I would do something more closely aligned with the study that Myra Marx Ferree and Elaine J. Hall did on visual images of gender in sociological textbooks. Their study was precisely focused and very thorough. I do not feel like the findings in my study are anywhere near as valuable as theirs because mine are just too general or wide. Ferree and Hall relied more on a quantitative analysis that I think my study could have used.

I also think this study could have benefitted from focus groups made up of students who read these papers regularly. I know that my professional experience gives me a different perspective and that perhaps I am too dismissive of some of the media's actions as I consider them unintentional. I would have liked to understand students' perceptions of these papers and see the images and portrayals through their perspectives.

### **Concluding Remarks**

I have a new appreciation for media literacy programs after having done this research. I think gendered images are only one part of the unintentional, yet troublesome, messages that the media sends. Media is only going to be more and more invasive as technology develops and I think arming adolescents with the skills to identify and combat these images would be extremely beneficial. Lessons about the portrayals of normalcy and how misleading they can be would be very invaluable. I also believe that media consumers should know that they no longer are stuck in the role of consumers. They are

media “users” and can also use the available technologies to have their own say, whether they involve a professional media organization or not. If people are challenging stereotypes, they should have an outlet for sharing their accomplishments. One should not feel like being a passive consumer of media is their only option.

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