

Synthesis Essay: Influence of Media on Women

Question 1

(reading time 15 minutes. Suggested writing time-40 minutes. This question counts one-third of the total essay section score.)

Directions: The prompt that follows is based on six accompanying sources. This essay requires you to integrate a variety of sources into a coherent, well-written essay. Refer to the sources, both directly and indirectly, to support your position. Avoid mere paraphrasing or summarizing. Your argument should be the central focus; the use of the sources should support your argument.

Introduction

“I’ve yet to be on a campus where most women weren’t worrying about some aspect of combining marriage, children, and a career. I’ve yet to find one where many men were worrying about the same thing.” - Gloria Steinem

Media has always been influential in the way they portray the role of women in society. What exactly has that influence been? How does it affect women? Does it help or harm? Does it encourage or enslave?

Assignment

Read the following sources carefully. Then, in an essay that synthesizes at least three of the sources for support, take a position that defends, challenges, or qualifies the notion that the media has had a positive effect on women.

Synthesize at least three of the sources for support. Refer to the sources by their titles (Source A, Source B, etc.) or by the descriptions in the parentheses.

SOURCE A (Goudarzi)

SOURCE B (Quindlen 1)

SOURCE C (Rubenstein)

SOURCE D (Quindlen 2)

SOURCE E (Hewlett)

SOURCE F (Rosie the Riveter poster)

SOURCE A

Female 'fat talk' mandatory, study finds

Kvetching about cellulite may help women forge friendships

By Sara Goudarzi

LiveScience

March 14, 2007

It's almost inevitable: When women get together, the chatter eventually turns to whose skinny jeans don't fit anymore and who weighs in heavier on the scale. And participation is socially mandatory, a new study finds.

Researchers call this "fat talk," a term coined to describe a behavior common in middle school-aged Caucasian females. But the phenomenon seems to occur in older females as well.

"We have found in our research that both male and female college students know the norm of fat talk—that females are supposed to say negative things about their bodies in a group of females engaging in fat talk," said study co-author Denise Martz of Appalachian State University.

Self-degradation is predictable

In one study, Martz and her colleagues showed 124 male and female college students a scene describing three women engaging in fat talk. The test subjects were then asked to predict how a fourth female would respond to this discussion.

Forty percent of male subjects and 51 percent of female subjects believed that the fourth female would self-degrade her body, in results that will be detailed in the June issue of the journal *Body Image: An International Journal of Research*.

"Because women feel pressured to follow the fat talk norm, they are more likely to engage in fat talk with other females," Martz told LiveScience. "Hence, women normalize their own body dissatisfaction with one another."

"If there are women out there who feel neutrally or even positively about their bodies, I bet we never hear this from them for fear of social sanction and rejection," she said.

Coping mechanism

As obesity rates in the United States climb, more and more females are finding their bodies further from the beauty ideal put forth in the media, and thus more women could be coping through fat talk, researchers hypothesize.

"Females like to support one another and fat talk elicits support," Martz said. "An example would be one saying, 'It's like, I'm so fat today,' and another would respond, 'No, you are not fat, you look great in those pants.'"

Fat talk also allows females to appear modest, a prized quality in a culture that shuns egotism.

"We tend to dislike arrogance and especially dislike it in women ('bitches')," Martz explained. "Women are perceived as OK if they fat talk and acknowledge that their bodies are not perfect but they are working on it."

Land of opportunity

The phenomenon might be exclusive to wealthier countries where food is abundant. In nations where famine rules, people often regard heavier bodies as a sign of good fortune and status, Martz said.

In the United States some people show their social status by their ability to be thin, which translates into meaning they are disciplined in their food intake and exercise, Martz said.

Researchers hope to better understand fat talk and its function in society to create awareness and instill change.

MSNBC.com

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17600911/print/1/displaymode/1098/>

SOURCE B

Quindlen: The Good Enough Mother

Forget about day camp or mandatory Gymboree. What's the point of raising kids if we don't have a good time and a few laughs?

By Anna Quindlen

Newsweek

Feb. 21

There was a kind of carelessness to my childhood. I wandered away from time to time, rode my bike too far from home, took the trolley to nowhere in particular and back again. If you had asked my mother at any given time where I was, she would likely have paused from spooning Gerber's peas into a baby's mouth or ironing our school uniforms and replied, "She's around here somewhere."

By the new standards of mothering, my mother was a bust. Given the number of times I got lost when I was young, she might even be termed neglectful. There's only one problem with that conclusion. It's dead wrong. My mother was great at what she did. Don't misunderstand: she didn't sit on the floor and help us build with our Erector sets, didn't haul us from skating rink to piano lessons. She couldn't even drive. But where she was always felt like a safe place.

The idea that that's enough is a tough sell in our current culture, and not simply because if one of my kids had been found wandering far from our home there would have been a caseworker and a cop at the door. We live in a perfection society now, in which it is possible to make our bodies last longer, to manipulate our faces so the lines of laughter and distress are wiped out. We believe in the illusion of control, and nowhere has that become more powerful—and more pernicious—than in the phenomenon of manic motherhood. What the child-care guru D. W. Winnicott once called "the ordinary devoted mother" is no longer good enough. Instead there is an *über*-mom who bounces from soccer field to school fair to play date until she falls into bed at the end of the day, exhausted, her life somewhere between the Stations of the Cross and a decathlon.

A perfect storm of trends and events contributed to this. One was the teeter-totter scientific argument of nature versus nurture. When my mother was raising kids, there was a sub rosa assumption that they were what they were. The smart one. The sweet one. Even the bad one. There was only so much a mother could do to mold the clay she'd been dealt.

But as I became a mother, all that was changing. Little minds, we learned from researchers, were infinitely malleable, even before birth. Don't get tense: tense moms make tense infants. (That news'll make you tense!) In a prenatal exercise class, I remember lying on the mat working on what was left of my stomach muscles, listening to the instructor repeating, "Now hug your baby." If I had weak abs, did that mean my baby went unhugged? Keeping up with the Joneses turned into keeping up with the Joneses' kids. Whose mothers, by the way, lied. I now refuse to believe in 9-month-olds who speak in full sentences. But I was more credulous, and more vulnerable, when I had a 9-month-old myself.

This craziness sounds improbable in the face of the feminist revolution that transformed the landscape of America during our lifetime. But at some level it is the fruit of that revolution, a comeuppance cleverly disguised as a calling. Every time we take note of the fact that work is not a choice but an economic necessity—"most women have to work, you know"—it's an apology for freedom. How better to circumvent the power of the new woman than with the idea of mothering not as care but as creation? Every moment for children was a teachable moment—and every teachable moment missed was a measure of a lousy mom.

My baby-boomer friends and I were part of the first generation of women who took for granted that we would work throughout our lifetime, and like most pioneers we made it up as we went along. In 1976, Dr. Spock revised his bible of child care to say that it was all right if we worked and had children as well. There was a slapdash approach to melding these disparate roles, usually reflected in the iconic woman at a business meeting with spit-up on her shoulder. My first sitter was the erstwhile manager of a cult punk band. She was a good sitter, too. We got by.

But quicker than you could say nanny cam, books appeared, seminars were held and modern motherhood was codified as a profession. Professionalized for women who didn't work outside the home: if they were giving up

MSNBC.com

6/6/2007

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6960127/site/newsweek/print/1/displaymode/1098/>

SOURCE C

Teens: No need to be perfect

Atoosa Rubenstein, ex-Seventeen editor, tells teens how to be themselves

TODAY

April 6, 2007

Math, English, student council, prom committee, varsity soccer, after school jobs — the pressure is on for teenagers today. Juggling it all and trying to strive for perfection at the same time can be tough for girls. Atoosa Rubenstein, former editor of Seventeen and a teen expert, offers her advice on how teens can resist pressure to be perfect, but still find their own greatness. Read her from MySpace blog:

Last night I was at dinner with Ari's family for Passover and everyone was asking me the same question: "So, what are you doing now that you've left Seventeen?" I don't fault them for asking. After all, that's the question EVERYONE who doesn't work with me on a day-to-day basis asks. They're used to seeing me as their over-achieving, did-you-see-her-on-television relative and friend. And I liked being that person until...I didn't. I realized I was structuring my life to please THEM rather than to please myself. You may relate: How many people have asked you "So ... Where are you going to college?" Or "So ... What do you want to do when you graduate?" While sometimes people are just naturally curious, I've learned that often they also want to put you in a box to make it easier to understand you. And honestly, WE feel uncomfortable if we can't provide them with an easy box to put us in. At least, I do ... or did. But what I want you to know is that your greatness — your unique brand of magic — lies not in being an easy-to-label metaphorical box. Your greatness is not defined by the kind of guy who wants to date you or the style of clothes you wear. Your greatness is not defined by the college who accepts you or the job you get once you graduate. Your greatness sits inside you waiting for you to notice it even when the world sends you signals that isn't there (i.e. the guy who ignores you or the college that sends you the thin envelope with the rejection letter inside).

Your greatness depends on YOU to feed it and nurture it. It depends on YOU to believe in it when no one else does. Your greatness is about the kind of person you are and the contribution you make to humanity — to fulfilling the role in our world that only YOU, with your unique mosaic of experiences and interests can.

Question: Are you embarrassed by your own greatness? When people give you a compliment, are you self-deprecating? Do you change the subject or call attention to something that you DON'T excel at? Do you say "I'm sorry" anytime a conversation or interaction doesn't go perfectly — even if someone ELSE bumps into YOU? (That's basically saying, "I'm sorry to be ALIVE — I'm not worthy.")

I used to be like that, and am trying to recover from it now. Because I was embarrassed of my greatness, I focused instead on trying to be PERFECT in order to deserve the praise. That came with its own cauldron of pressures, sister, because as you know, NO ONE is perfect ... Yet everyone has their own brand of greatness. That is the beautiful thing. Still, I felt pressure from my mother to be all the things SHE wanted me to be because she didn't have the opportunities I had been given. I felt pressure from the magazine industry to be the kind of editor THEY thought I should be. I felt pressure from my husband to be the kind of wife HE thought I should be. And somewhere along the path of perfection, I lost the sense of being the woman I WANTED to be and actually WAS — it all became blurred with everyone else's expectations for me.

I don't want that to happen to you. One of my last editor's letters at Seventeen contained the following quote from the brilliant Marianne Williamson (it's often incorrectly credited to Nelson Mandela, who has said many other brilliant things himself):

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

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<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17953507/print/1/displaymode/1098/>

SOURCE D

There She Was. There She Goes.

Miss America was supplanted by her sisters, who carried briefcases instead of roses and preferred a suit to a maillot and heels.

By Anna Quindlen

Newsweek

April 17, 2006

A kid of my generation doesn't forget those rare occasions when she was permitted to stay up until midnight. I remember the Jiffy Pop rattling like maracas on the stove, a pitcher of Kool-Aid the incandescent pink of Barbie-brand plutonium in the fridge. I remember the ventriloquist's dummies and the shrieking arias, the tulle and the French twists and Bert Parks, who had a man tan before man tan came in a bottle, crooning, "There She Is." And there she was, with the unsteady crown and the bouquet of roses and the teary smile. Miss America. Your ideal.

Feminism killed off Miss America, but instead of leaving us with our memories, the pageant organization is presiding over a slow sad demise, like a deathbed with a talent component. Recently the people who run the franchise announced that they were reincarnating the preliminary rounds as a reality-TV show. This follows the ignominious slink from network coverage to Country Music Television, the ill-conceived casual wear and civics quizzes, and a round of rotating hosts, all the outcome of years of tumbling ratings. Let it go. Just let it go.

Feminism killed off Miss America, but not in the way originally intended or predicted. It didn't manage to overthrow unrealistic and bizarre standards of female beauty; if it had, Hollywood wouldn't be chockablock with bobblehead starlets who think an oyster cracker is an entree. And it didn't succeed in liberating women from being seen as sex objects, not when porn star Jenna Jameson can natter away on television about her career as though she were a bank manager.

But the revolution offered women many more outlets for the pursuit of power and prominence, outlets in which they didn't have to walk around in the truly strange combo of swimsuit and stiletto heels. And make no mistake: the pageant was about the single-minded pursuit of power and prominence at a time when women had to pretend little interest in either. (Apparently the pageant folks ditched the Miss Congeniality title because all the contestants voted for themselves.) When I was a kid, Miss America had clout. Schools and hospitals and rubber-chicken dinners jockeyed to get her to come and say a few words. Incredible as it seems today, everyone knew her face. Like Paris Hilton, but with white gloves. And clothes.

But Miss America was supplanted by her sisters, who carried briefcases instead of roses and preferred a suit to a maillot-and-heels ensemble. All those schools had other options for their assemblies: Sally Ride, if they had connections, or just the first woman county commissioner. Little kids would drag their moms in for careers day: she's a dentist, she's a doctor, she's a manager on the assembly line.

Who needed Miss America, whose biggest claim to fame was that she could answer a question about advice to America's youth with some variation of "Be yourself," or "To thine own self be true" if she was an English major from the Northeast? Still, the pageant tried to keep up. The contestants were supposed to adopt a platform, breast cancer or drug prevention, but they were competing with Elizabeth Taylor, and then Angelina Jolie. Either Sallie Krawcheck, the CFO of Citigroup, or Andrea Jung, who runs Avon, could walk across a stage in an evening dress with aplomb after a very full day of real juggling. A corporate jet sure beats flying coach to county fairs with a chaperone.

Reality TV didn't do Miss America any favors, either. From watching "Dr. 90210," Americans knew you could buy the clean profile and waist-to-hip ratio that might wow the judges. "America's Next Top Model" took over the terrain of beautiful women willing to kill to make the cut; "The Apprentice" featured carnivorous careerists. The pageant limped from its ancestral home of Atlantic City to Las Vegas, a place that resembles the Emerald City of Oz, only less realistic. Now it will hopscotch from town to town. Miss America has become a woman without a country.

MSNBC.com

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/12223553/site/newsweek/print/1/displaymode/1098/>

SOURCE E

Want to return to your career?

Many women who left the job market face hurdles getting back on-track

TODAY

May 18, 2007

It's been over 20 years since the Wall Street Journal first coined the phrase "glass ceiling" and yet today only 12 of all Fortune 500 companies are run by a female CEO and the average woman still makes 80 cents for every dollar a man makes.

In her new book "Off-Ramps and On-Ramps: Keeping Talented Women On The Road To Success" author and expert Sylvia Ann Hewlett explores why women want to get back into the job market and the hurdles they face in doing so.

Here's an excerpt:

WHY DO WOMEN WANT BACK IN?

Desperate Housewives notwithstanding, talented women who blithely throw their careers to the wind are the exception rather than the rule. As mentioned earlier, the overwhelming majority of highly qualified women currently off-ramped (93 percent) want to return to their careers.

Many of these women have financial reasons for wanting to get back to work. Nearly half (46 percent) cite "wanting to have their own independent source of income" as an important motivating factor. Women who participated in our focus groups talked about their discomfort with "dependence." However good their marriages, many disliked needing to ask for money. Not being able to splurge on some small extravagance or make their own philanthropic choices without clearing it with their husbands did not sit well with them either. It's also true that a significant proportion of women seeking on-ramps are facing troubling shortfalls in family income: 38 percent cite "household income no longer sufficient for family needs" and 24 percent cite "partner's income no longer sufficient for family needs." Given what has happened to the cost of housing (up 55 percent over the past five years), the cost of a college education (up 40 percent over the past decade), and the cost of health insurance (up 87 percent since 2000), it's easy to see why many professionals find it hard to manage a family budget on just one income.

But financial pressures do not tell the whole story. Many of these women also found deep pleasure in their chosen careers and want to reconnect with something they love. Forty-three percent cite the "enjoyment and satisfaction" they derive from their careers as an important reason to return—among teachers this figure rises to 54 percent, and among doctors it rises to 70 percent (see figures 2-8 and 2-9). A further 16 percent want to "regain power and status in their profession." In our focus groups women talked eloquently about how work gives shape and structure to their lives, boosts confidence and self-esteem, and confers status and standing in their communities. As one former executive put it, "Cocktail party chitchat is so much easier if you can claim to be a professional, even a lapsed professional. Besides which, my children insist on it. My fifteen-year-old daughter doesn't want to be caught dead with a mom who is 'just' a housewife." For many off-rampers, their professional identity remains their primary identity, despite the fact that they are currently taking time out. This makes a great deal of sense given the length of women's working lives—which currently spans thirty-five to forty years. For many off-rampers time out represents a mere blip on the radar screen.

Perhaps the most unexpected reason women give for returning to work centers on altruism. Twenty-four percent of women currently looking for on-ramps are motivated by "a desire to give something back to society" and are seeking jobs that allow them to contribute in some way. In focus groups off-ramped women talked about how their time at home had changed their aspirations. Whether they'd gotten involved in protecting the wetlands, supporting the local library, rebuilding a playground, or being a "big sister" to a disadvantaged child, they all felt newly connected to the importance of what one woman called "the work of care."

MSNBC.com

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18726931/print/1/displaymode/1098/>

SOURCE F



Rubric for Media Influence on Women Essay

9 Essays that earn a score of 9 meet the criteria for essays that receive a score of 8. In addition, they are especially sophisticated in the use of language, explanation and argument.

8 (Successful) These essays respond to the prompt successfully, employing ideas from at least three of the sources from the prompt. They take a position that defends, challenges, or qualifies the claim that the media has had a positive influence on the role of women in society. They effectively argue the position and support the argument with appropriate evidence. The control of language is extensive and the writing errors are minimal.

7 These essays meet the criteria for essays that receive a score of 6 but provide more depth and strength to the argument and evidence. The prose style is mature and shows a wide control over language.

6 (Satisfactory) These essays respond to the prompt satisfactorily. Using at least three of the sources from the prompt, these essays take a position that defends, challenges, or qualifies the claim that the media has had a positive influence on the roles of women. The position is adequately argued with support from appropriate evidence. The writing may contain minor errors in diction or in syntax, but the prose is generally clear.

5 These essays take a position that defends, challenges, or qualifies the claim that the media has had a positive influence on the roles of women in society. It supports the position with appropriate evidence. These essays may be inconsistent, uneven, or limited in the development of their argument. Although the writing usually conveys the writer's ideas and perspectives, it may demonstrate lapses in diction or syntax or an overly simplistic style.

4 (Inadequate) These essays respond to the prompt inadequately. They have difficulty taking a clear position that defends, challenges or qualifies the question. The evidence may be insufficient or may not use enough of the sources. The writer has limited control over the elements of effective writing.

3 These essays meet the criteria for a score of 4 but reveal less success in taking a claim. The presentation of evidence and arguments is unconvincing. The writer has limited control over the elements of effective writing.

2 (Little Success) These essays demonstrate little success at taking a position that defends, challenges, or qualifies the claim and show little success in presenting it clearly and with appropriate evidence from the sources in the prompt. These essays may misunderstand the prompt, may fail to establish a position with supporting evidence. The prose demonstrates consistent weaknesses in the conventions of effective writing.

1 These essays meet the criteria for a score of 2 but are undeveloped, especially simplistic in their explanation, argument and/or evidence, or weak in their control of writing.