

## Movies and Discussion Questions

Below is a listing of movies produced by the Media Education Foundation, along with several suggested discussion questions. The films explore a wide range of issues that pertain to sexual violence, and are valuable tools for engaging critical thought. The questions are adapted from study guides that are available at [www.mediaed.org](http://www.mediaed.org) (unless otherwise noted). The full study guides are much longer and more comprehensive, so check them out. More detailed descriptions of each film are also available at the MEF website.

### **Generation M**

Explores misogyny in the media.

- Do you feel that female music artists are promoted differently than male music artists?
- What kinds of toys and entertainment products do you believe are appropriate for kids, and should parents concern themselves with the alleged gendered nature of many toys?
- Why do you think gender roles are still policed as rigorously as they are today?
- Why do you believe men outnumber women in prison by a wide margin, particularly with respect to violent crimes?
- Why do you believe women outnumber men as students in colleges and universities nationwide, and that women are graduating at higher rates?
- At a time when our country has embraced more women in positions of political power, why do you believe Rush Limbaugh uses derisive and sexist language when referring to his opponents who are female? Do you agree with the filmmaker that Limbaugh would never make fun of someone being a man? What does that tell us about his criticism?
- Think about the first time you heard the term “feminism”. Was it presented to you in a positive or negative way? What were the ideas presented to you about feminism from whoever exposed you to the term?

### **Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats & Rhymes**

Discusses the portrayal of masculinity in popular hip-hop music.

- Are all hip-hop artists alike? Do they all present similar images of men and women in their lyrics and videos? If you believe there are differences, who are some of the artists that present alternative images?
- Could Hurt’s critique of hip-hop be extended to other types of popular music and/or popular culture? Are there any other forms of pop culture that you enjoy yet feel uneasy about?
- Katz argues that not only men of color but also working class white men feel the need to be physically hard and tough. Do you think this argument could be extended to other men as well? What connection do you see between this working class white male need to be tough and what Hurt is saying about the need for so many black men to project hardness?
- Why does this video provide statistics about sexual violence? Knowing that rap videos don’t simply cause people to act violently, what connection do you see between popular culture and violence? Leaving aside simplistic cause-and-effect arguments, what do you think Hurt was trying to say here?
- When men really want to hurt and dominate other men they call them by feminized names. Why do you think this is? What might be some of the effects of this? Do you think it’s always been this way?
- Why do you think the rappers that Hurt interviewed were unwilling to even discuss homophobia?
- Why are images of violence and sex easier to sell than positive or political messages?

### **Killing Us Softly 3**

Explores images of women in advertising.

- What, according to our culture, is the definition of “femininity”? What characteristics are considered “feminine” in our culture? Do other cultures consider different characteristics “feminine”? What about “masculinity”?
- What products are sold by people of color? What is the setting in these advertisements?
- What would sexual freedom be like? How would it be different than limits on freedom? How would all groups of women and men benefit from sexual freedom?
- What are some stories media tell about women? What about men?

- Jean Kilbourne comments that women of color are disproportionately shown as animalistic and exotic. What effect(s) might this have on girls and women of color? What effect(s) might this have on the way that others view girls and women of color?
- Do you feel that femininity, or what it means to be female, and masculinity, or what it means to be male, are learned or natural? Why?
- Do you feel that the culture is opening up, that it has started to embrace more willingly women and girls that go against the traditional feminine type? If so, why do you think this is happening? If not, why not?

### ***The Price of Pleasure***

#### **Critiques sexism and racism in pornography.**

- What are some of the ways that pornography has been pushed into the mainstream? Do you think this mainstreaming has normalized pornography? Why or why not? How does the normalization of pornography affect the culture and the content it produces?
- Fans of pornography argue that it's the choice of the performer to be in pornography and the choice of the viewer to watch it. How does this make you feel? Do you believe in a larger, social responsibility? Or do you think responsibility lies more with the individual?
- Do you agree with Sarah Katherine Lewis' statement: If a woman's best choice is pornography, then there's a real problem with the labor system?
- Why do you think racist imagery is so prevalent in pornography? Do you think the mass media has been successful in correcting some of the stereotypical imagery they produce? Give specific examples.
- Is there any situation where heterosexual pornography can be feminist? Why or why not?

### ***Speak Up!***

#### **Looks at ways to improve the lives of LGBT youth.**

- Matthew Shepard was killed because he was gay. In the public service advertisement featured in the film, a number of young people are shown shouting out homophobic epithets like "fag" and "queer". Judy Shepard, Matthew's mother, says at the end of the ad, "The next time you use words like these, think about what they really mean."
  - What do these words "really mean"? Are they just words? Do words have consequences? If so, when and how? What are some consequences? If not, why not?
  - Do you feel that harassment like this has effects beyond the specific individuals involved? If so, how and in what specific ways?
- Andrea says that she worries about the safety of her son much more than her daughter, "because our culture is much more afraid of gay men than lesbian women."
  - Do you agree with Andrea?
- If Andrea is correct that gay men are more feared than lesbian women in our culture, does this mean that lesbian women are safe? Why or why not? What's the relationship between fear of gay men and fear of gay women?
- Al Toney, of Safe Homes of Central Massachusetts, says that "one of the biggest myths I hear in talking to the kids is, 'Well, I don't mind if so-and-so is gay as long as they don't try anything on me.'"
  - When someone says "as long as they don't try anything on me", what myths get perpetuated? What is implied in this statement?
- Danny and Julie, from MTV's Real World, talk about how intolerance toward people because of their sexual identity often results from ignorance. Julie calls for talking about sexuality openly so that it's no longer considered "weird".
  - The concepts of "weirdness", "strangeness" and "difference" all bear similarities. Look up and think about the literal definitions of these words, and compare them to the literal definitions of "queerness". Then compare all of these concepts to our common association of "queerness" with homosexuality. What do all of these words, at the level of the very definitions of the language we use, have in common?
  - Based on all of these definitions, what do you think is necessary for something to be considered strange, different, weird or queer? Can something be strange or different in its very nature, all by itself, apart from its context?

### **Tough Guise**

Discusses violence, media and masculinity.

- Many people think the very concept of “gender issues” is synonymous with “women’s issues”. Talk about why this is so. And discuss how this misconception makes it difficult for many men, and women, to understand the gendered nature of men’s lives.
- Is it “nit-picking” to suggest that we should not use male-inflected language to suggest universal ideas and experiences? Are we overreacting or reading into things too much, for example, when we question descriptions such as “man has always searched for answers,” or “man’s religions have unifying themes” as inherently exclusionary and sexist? How might the way we approach and think about such formulations be different if we said “men and women” instead?
- What do you make of the increasing presence of overtly sexualized male bodies in advertising, posed in provocative, at times submissive, ways?
- The vast majority of gay-bashing incidents are perpetrated by young men. Discuss the reasons for gay-bashing, focusing on the gender and sexual identities of the perpetrators.
- In what cases, or environments, do you feel a “hyper-masculine” pose – one based on control, power and the threat of violence – might be necessary? Are there such situations?
- What sort of power can the limited, sometimes racist, portrayal of men of color exercise over white boys? And why do you feel white boys from the suburbs seem to be so taken in by these images?
- Do you feel the culture is opening up, that it has started to embrace more willingly males that go against the traditional masculine type? If so, why do you think this is happening? If not, why not?

### **What a Girl Wants**

Explores commercial culture’s impact on girls’ identities.

- What is the role of advertising in a capitalist society?
- What do you think goes into making ads? What kind of research?
- Do you think that the kinds of stories told by advertisements targeted at kids simply reflect what teens are and what they want? Or do you think ads also play a role in creating these things?
- What do the mass media tell us about what it means to be American? Is this ideal of America connected to buying things? Is it connected to ideals of femininity and masculinity? What American values are missing from the stories told by the mass media?
- Do you think popular celebrities dress and act like they do completely by choice? Who and what else might influence their choices? Do you influence these choices?

### **War Zone\***

Examines men’s street harassment of women.

- The filmmaker talks about using her video camera as a weapon to take back the power that the men who harass her try to take and using it to turn the aggression back at them. Do you think she successfully does so?
- Why do you think the some of the men turned from or dodged the camera?
- Some men in the video argue that they aren’t being disrespectful, they are only offering compliments. Do you think this is ever the case?
- One woman in the film argued that the comments from men on the street are compliments. Do you think many women feel that way?
- How do you feel about the argument that women shouldn’t dress “that way” if they don’t want male attention?
- Why do you think the majority of street harassment is male-on-female?
- The filmmaker states that “Women in particular have to take their destinies into their own hands. We have to learn to control our own lives. Part of the way that we do that is through the men that we love.” Do you agree with this statement?

\* Original questions, no MEF study guide available.