Introduction

The image of beauty presented today to young women is more unrealistic and unattainable than ever before. With the proliferation of digital imaging techniques, the beauty ideal presented is often far from real. What is particularly troubling about the construction of the digitally altered ideal is that many young women who compare themselves to these images do not realise the amount of computer-aided tinkering which occurs.

Studies have shown that many teenage girls have distorted perceptions about their own body image - perceptions which are shaped by the 'beauty ideal' presented to young women through various media sources - television, magazines, the internet.

The Queen Victoria Women’s Centre (QVWC) received funding from the Victorian Office for Youth to implement the ‘Young Women, Body Image and the Digital Age’ Project as a part of the Office’s $2.1 million Teenagers Go For Your Life – Positive Body Image Strategy.

In 2007, sixteen schools from across Victoria participated in the ‘live’ stage of the project with one-day forums led by digital imaging, body image and health experts. In the second stage, the forum participants used a peer education approach to spread awareness about the extent of digital image manipulation and the negative affects of body image.

The QVWC is pleased to be able to share with you this Young Women, Body Image and the Digital Age manual, which follows on from the forum with the same objective, to encourage positive body image and perceptions among young Victorian women. It is especially aimed at helping teachers, peer educators and other professionals working with young women.

We hope that the information and activities in the manual can empower young women to filter and understand media messages concerning body image and expectations.

The publication covers three main areas:

1. Talking about positive body image
2. Getting wise to media messages
3. Digital image manipulation

The QVWC welcomes your feedback on the contents of this manual, the first title in our QVWC Women’s Capacity Building Kit. Your feedback will inform our future positive body image work and publications.

Catherine Brown
Chair - Queen Victoria Women’s Centre Trust
TALKING ABOUT BODY IMAGE

‘Body image’ is how we think and feel about our bodies. Often it has no bearing on our actual appearance.

Unhappiness with our body image has become almost a cultural norm for women in westernised societies. According to research by the Victorian Government, only one in five women are satisfied with their body weight and almost half of normal weight women believe they are larger than they actually are. There are a wide range of factors that contribute to a negative body image including:

- A cultural tendency to judge people by their appearance
- Peer pressure among teenage girls to be slim, go on diets and compare themselves with others
- Media and advertising images promoting thinness as the ideal
- A tendency in women’s media to push fad diets and weight loss programs
- Well-meaning public health campaigns that urge people to lose weight.

NEGATIVE BODY IMAGE IS DAMAGING

A distorted body image can lead to unhappiness and self-destructive behaviours, like dieting or binge eating. About nine out of 10 young Australian women have dieted at least once in their lives. Some girls as young as 10 years of age are dangerously obsessed with the way they look.

THE MEDIA AND NEGATIVE BODY IMAGE

The images of young women in the media may have a cumulative effect on women’s satisfaction with their appearance. One study explored women’s responses to eight popular fashion magazines– and the results showed that the body satisfaction of the women was influenced by the thin ideal presented.

THE HEALTH PROBLEMS

Women and men, adults and adolescents, who are dissatisfied with their body image and are extreme dieters are often likely to also suffer depression and low self esteem. Some of the symptoms they experience include:

- moodiness
- obsessive behaviours
- suicidal thoughts and behaviour
- depression
- anxiety
- guilt.

Psychologically, the poor body image of young Australian women can lead to eating disorders and mental health issues. It is bound to affect many aspects of their lives. It has been found that one in every hundred Australian adolescent girls:

- develops Anorexia Nervosa
- eats a restricted range of foods
- has disordered eating patterns
- experiences big weight swings
- sometimes inadvertently gains weight
- is less physically active.

References:
3. Family and Community Development Committee Victoria, 2005, Parliament Inquiry into issues relating to the development of body image among young people and associated effects on their health and wellbeing, Family and Community Development Committee, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne

...this project was excellent in that it has raised young women’s awareness of the issue of body image and the digital age.... It has opened a door for further discussions by providing information so students are better informed...
GETTING WISE TO MEDIA MESSAGES

Being media savvy means young women can:

• analyse and understand the values behind all kinds of communication, both editorial and advertising
• know how to access all kinds of media and how to use media wisely
• understand how mass media works, and how it produces meanings
• produce their own media.

Media literacy matters because it:

• gives us as media consumers the kinds of skills to ‘unpack’ media messages
• empowers us to make informed choices about the media we consume
• stops us being negatively affected by media
• allows us to see how media shapes perceptions and popular culture
• can improve our enjoyment of media through informed choices.

Young women who become media literate develop:

• new skills to resist media pressures
• the ability to think critically about the subtle and persuasive messages that link appearance with success and happiness
• awareness about how air-brushing and other digital techniques present fake images
• greater awareness of their own television viewing habits and preferences
• ways to meet their social learning needs, apart from television.

ENCOURAGING YOUNG WOMEN TO BETTER UNDERSTAND MEDIA IMAGES

There are three key elements we can encourage young women to think about so they can better understand the meanings of media:

• The images and icons
• The text and language
• The context.

Images and icons
Images can present complex meanings in a deceptively simple way. Advertising and media agencies spend loads of time, thought and money choosing images to suggest specific cultural meanings. Some images are icons, that is, images that are so common they are recognised by most people, in the same way that a cross symbolises Christianity. Their selective use can be especially persuasive.

Text and language
Media that combines text, or sound and images in multimedia, creates a complete package. There are often few words, but they are carefully selected to convey several levels of meaning. It’s important to help students look beyond the superficial meanings of texts to their more underlying meanings and intentions.

Context
No media is developed in a vacuum. Encouraging young women to be conscious of the social, cultural and political factors behind the making of media can help them recognise ‘hidden’ messages and deeper meanings.

Some easy steps to encourage media literacy:

• Talk openly with young women about magazines, television and the internet
• Show an interest in what they read and see, and ask them why they choose to view that. This isn’t about judging, it’s about getting them to think about their favourite media
• Discuss critical media consumption in terms of the three key elements: Images and icons; Text and language; and Context.
• Encourage young women to consider these elements while they are reading or watching
• Find time in short bursts for media literacy exercises
• Encourage young women to be selective not ‘habitual’ consumers, such as advising them to read TV guides and choose the programs they watch
• Encourage young women to work out who publishes websites and other media and to consider any ‘hidden’ messages
• Include media literacy materials in information for parents. Motivate them to be involved in their family’s media consumption.

In general, media literacy encourages our critical thinking and analysis.

Most of all, media literacy can reduce young women’s concerns about their bodies and reduce their dissatisfaction with their body image.

None of these steps are about judging the media that students consume. It’s about starting a dialogue with them about why they consume the media they do.
**ACTIVITIES FOR MEDIA LITERACY**

**ACTIVITY 1: UNPACKING ADVERTISING MEANINGS**

- Working with a partner, choose one advertisement from a glossy women’s magazine
- Using the three key elements: Image and iconography; Text and language; and Context, discuss and ‘unpack’ the meanings of the ad you and your partner have selected
- Write your responses to the questions below.

**Image and iconography**

What key images or icons does the ad present? What are their ‘superficial’ meanings?

What are some deeper meanings these objects might present?
**Text and language**

What text and language are used in the ad? What 'direct' meaning do these have?

What deeper or secondary meanings do the text and language present?
**Context**

Give some of the social, cultural and political contexts or issues you think are necessary to understand the ad.

What do these contexts tell us about the ad’s more complex meanings?
ACTIVITY 2: WHAT ARE GLOSSY MAGAZINE ADVERTISEMENTS REALLY SELLING?

- Working in small groups, choose an ad from a glossy magazine
- Divide the whiteboard into sections and assign a section to each group
- Ask each group to work together to consider and respond to the questions below
- Have each group dot point their responses on the whiteboard
- Have each group talk about their ad and their responses to the questions.

Example: This advertisement for CK Be perfume by Calvin Klein which appeared on both billboards and magazines in 2000.

Questions to consider
- What is this ad selling? How do you know this? How easy is it to tell what the ad is selling?
- What are the main images used in this ad? Why do you think these images were chosen?
- What text is used in this ad? What does it tell you?
- Who do you think the advertisers are trying to reach? Why?
- What is the context for this ad? Does it make you think of other things? What are those things and why do you think you’ve made that connection?

TIP!
Before doing this exercise, you may wish to review the Three Key Elements for unpacking media messages: Images and icons; Language and text and Context.

TIP!
You might like to use different types of magazines e.g. Vogue, men’s magazines, fitness, financial, etc. Be sure to tell your students which magazine their ad is from.
**DIGITAL IMAGE MANIPULATION**

**WHAT IS DIGITAL IMAGE MANIPULATION?**

Digital manipulation is about changing graphic images via computer technology. Image manipulation or editing has been around since the birth of photography itself. What has changed is that it was once mostly a crude use of inks and dyes with which photographers just removed the spots and blobs from their negatives created by their chemicals.

Now, the digital manipulation of images has been made easy with computer programs such as Photoshop. In the hands of professionals, ‘photoshopping’ has become a highly sophisticated skill applied to news photographs, graphic illustrations, television footage and advertising. These programs allow seamless changes to images that are almost impossible to detect. It is becoming increasingly difficult to decipher what is or isn’t real.

*Digital images can be manipulated to*

- be made lighter or brighter or more contrasting - this is called burning or dodging
- be made sharper
- be colour corrected, or even have the colours changed
- be cropped to reduce the edges of an image
- be cleaned up of dust and scratches or ‘red eye’
- have objects or people added or removed altogether
- have the actual setting of the photograph changed from one place to another
- have skin blemishes hidden or have curves and bumps removed from people.

**Discussion points**

- How much digital manipulation or editing is too much?
- Should we be informed when images are digitally manipulated?
- If we learn how and why images are manipulated, would we become more critical media consumers?
ACTIVITY 3: CHECKING OUT PHOTOSHOP

- Working in small groups click on the link http://demo.fb.se/e/girlpower/retouch/ for examples of digital image manipulation and editing.

In your small groups, discuss and respond to the questions below.

Source: http://demo.fb.se/e/girlpower/retouch/

Discussion points

- Why has this photo been manipulated?
- How do you interpret this photo?
- What are the media editors interested in having you think from this photo?
- What is the context of the photo? Is this photo supposed to be truth (journalism) or fantasy (art or advertising)?
- How might this photo have been interpreted without editing?

ACTIVITY 4: BEFORE AND AFTER

- Provide students with various celebrity ‘before and after’ photos.
- Discuss the questions below as a group.

Two examples

Source: http://m3.torispics.com/piles/?s=baphotoshop

Discussion points

- Which photo in each set is the original and which has been edited?
- What has been edited in each set?
- Why were the original photos edited?
- How might these photos have been interpreted without editing?
Positive Body Image InfoHub
Queen Victoria Women's Centre
The Positive Body Image resources you’ll find in InfoHub have been reviewed and recommended by a network of experts working in the fields of health, media, body image, government, research, and eating disorders. http://www.qvwc.org.au/infohub/positive_body_image_new

Voluntary Media Code of Conduct on Body Image
The Code is designed to encourage the fashion, media and advertising industries to place greater emphasis on diversity, positive body images and a focus on health rather than body shape. http://www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au/digitalAssets/26295_Body_Image_A4.pdf

Girl Stuff
A funny and sensible look at all aspects of getting through the teen years including lots on positive body image, confidence, healthy eating and activity.

Girls on the go!
Greater Dandenong Community Health Services

Flygirl
YWCA of Victoria email flygirl@ywca.net
A fun physical activity program for young women.

REAL magazine
REAL magazine is a 20-page full-colour publication that is written by young people for young women. http://www.realmagazine.net.au/

The Body Snatchers: how the media shapes women
Uncovers how the media, fashion and diet industries shapes females’ self image and encourages women to challenge society’s preoccupation with the ‘ideal’ body.

Pretty Stupid – Women’s Magazines and Body Image
Media Australia (03) 9510 3600 THIS IS A FAX NUMBER
Explores the pressure on young Australian girls to attain the perfect body. Includes input from magazine editors, a model agency and a dietitian. http://www.mediaust.com.au/videoEdDetail.asp?id=11

Unreal Images
NSW Department of Health.
The kit assists students to develop critical media literacy skills so as to be able to analyse images and messages about socially desirable bodies male and female bodies in the mass media.

Indigo Magazine
For teen girls without the usual hard sell. The images of girls in the magazine are not digitally altered. Available online and in selected newsagents. Magazine staff conduct body image workshops in schools. www.indigo4girls.com

Eating Disorders Foundation of Victoria www.eatingdisorders.org.au
The Butterfly Foundation www.thebutterflyfoundation.org.au
Absolutely Women’s Health www.rwh.org.au/wellwomens
Victorian Centre of Excellence in Eating Disorders www.ceed.org.au
Victorian Office for Youth www.youth.vic.gov.au