

# womanifesto

Newsletter of the MSU-Bozeman Women's Center

December, 2004

## Growing up in a Commercial Culture

By Aimee Kissel

As a parent, I sometimes feel frustrated by all the negative influences in my daughter's life. Societal violence, peer pressure, and bullies on the playground are some of the more obvious threats that cause every parent to worry. I am just beginning to see that there is a threat to my child I did not fully realize. I am referring to the overwhelming influence that mass media (television shows, commercials and the Internet) has on a child's attitudes, values, morals and behavior.

According to Juliet Schor's book *Born to Buy*, the average child views 20,000 commercials per year; a report by the United States Congress cites that children spend an average of five and a half hours per day using media, more time than they spend doing anything besides sleeping. What does this mean for society? How do the advertising campaigns designed specifically for children promote products in ways that undermine the lessons that teach our children right from wrong effect them?

Advertising is full of gender stereotyping, sexual connotations, unrealistic ideals of beauty and the constant, all consuming message that more is better and that being cool is defined solely by how much stuff you have. Many advertisements deliberately promote anti-parental, anti-authority messages and encourage youngsters to "nag" and "train" their parents to buy them the products they see advertised. One method advertisers employ to market "cool" is depicting kids with attitude, tricking their parents and teachers. As Nancy Shalek, president of Shalek Ad Agency points out in *Born To Buy*: "advertising at its best is making people feel that without their product, you're a loser. Kids are very sensitive to that...you open up emotional vulnerabilities and it's very easy to do with kids because they're the most emotionally vulnerable."

Advertisers and their commercials are not the only culprits in this generation of media overload. Television programs for children often portray characters in gender specific ways: many portray girls obsessed with shopping and make-up, and boys obsessed with gaining power through aggression and by making lots of money. A common theme is over-consumption. Some of the shows and advertisements seen on the Disney channel and Nickelodean depict girls who only want to spend money, and boys who want to make money at any expense.

Public and private schools are also infected with advertising. Channel One is a prime example of using the classroom to sell products and celebrities. Many schools have accepted agreements to show ten minutes of "news" to students each morning in exchange for free televisions and video equipment. The problem lies in the content of the programming shown to this captive audience; the stories are usually about celebrities and have very little serious content, and these "news" broadcasts include two minutes of commercials for items such as junk food, movies and video games. These commercials may be especially effective simply because the students view the products as being endorsed by the school.

Advertising in schools does not stop with Channel One; advertisements can be found on classroom computers, in the curriculum, on the gym floor and in flyers and order forms kids take home. Research is being conducted by ad agencies at school and some schools actually sell the contact information of their students. Several days ago my child brought home a color brochure advertising the movie *elf* starring Will Ferrell. *Elf* is not a documentary or an educational movie in any way. Why should we have to battle ads brought home from the very institution set in place to teach our children?

The effect of all these influences is astounding. Right now we have the most brand-oriented, consumer-involved, materialistic generation in American history. Many children describe who they are and their social status by the clothes they wear and other brand name products they own. Anxiety in children has become a major problem as electronic media replaces conventional play, and more children everyday are describing happiness as the accumulation of material possessions and money.

Media overload effects children physically as well as mentally. The government is viewing childhood obesity and overweight problems as a major public health threat because the numbers have reached such epidemic proportions. Junk food appears to have become a major food group when we look at the alarming numbers of overweight and obese children and teenagers. Fast food outlets alone spend \$3 billion in advertisements targeted at children who are exposed to one food commercial every five minutes. It should come as no surprise then that children often hound their parents to take them to McDonalds or buy them the latest fat filled treat. How



can we expect them to eat healthfully when the majority of commercials they see promote foods that are high in fat and sugar and low in nutrients? How can we expect them to exercise regularly when media promotes images of junk food and consumption much more effectively than engaging in sports or a game of tag?

Children receive the message that they must be thin and perfect in order to be accepted by society and their peers, and then see constant messages that encourage eating foods high in fat. According to the National Institute on Media and Family's website, a recent survey of nine and ten year olds revealed that 40% have tried to lose weight. As a more extreme example, plastic surgery (apparently not solely for medical reasons) for children in elementary and middle school actually exists and is on the rise.

Many people believe this is a problem for a parent to face alone: if you do not like the influence television and other media has on your children, turn off the television or simply say "no." Unfortunately, the solution is not quite so black and white. Limiting television and computer time will certainly help, and saying "no" more often is another piece of the puzzle, but these examples are by no means the entire solution. Families are not isolated from the rest of the community and children see advertising at school, at friends' homes and almost everywhere else they go. Even some daycare facilities promote products.

Parents cannot and should not force our children into a bubble to protect them from society. We can teach our children healthy eating habits and the value of exercise, but we need help. Schools need to become commercial free. Neighborhoods need to become safer so that children can feel confident going outside to play tag or kickball. Advertising agencies and manufacturers need to acknowledge their part in all of this and create healthier strategies and promote products that are valuable in helping children learn and grow in positive ways instead of producing materialistic junk that can only be

damaging. Consumers can purchase products that better reflect their values, and on a national level, the Federal Trade Commission needs to regulate children's advertising instead of the self-regulation commissions that the government currently has in place. Media literacy needs to be taught in every school and in every grade. Community gatherings or classes should be offered to inform adults of the problems and possible solutions. Kids need more positive role models and mentors who are willing to spend time with them. This is not an unstoppable epidemic and we can institute change if we choose to view this as the social problem it has become.

If you would like to learn more about how you can help or what other people are doing about changing our commercial culture, there are many resources available. I found a wonderful, down loadable, free, 32-page booklet entitled, "Tips for Parenting in a Commercial Culture" at [newdream.org](http://newdream.org). If you really want to learn about the latest research and effective solutions, I suggest you read Schor's book which is invaluable. *Born to Buy* is now available at the public library, so anyone interested in reading more can now check it out. (Thanks BPL!)

Finally, a bill has been introduced into Congress called the "Prevention of Childhood Obesity Act". The details can be found through a link at [commercialalert.org](http://commercialalert.org), an active group with lots of original ideas. If you feel strongly about this subject, be sure to read this bill and other related legislation and tell your representatives to support them if you think they are part of the solution. Let's make teaching values a priority and negative influences a minority.



### Local Business Spotlight: Your "Daily" Contribution

The Daily Coffee Bar on College Avenue is now pouring *Café Femenino*, a bean roasted by Yellowstone Coffee here in Bozeman. Daily owner Noel Kehoe began purchasing this fair trade item for resale and brewing because *Café Femenino* is helping to change the role of women in remote rural coffee communities. Through the sale of this fair trade organically grown coffee, these women receive better prices for their beans along with additional funds to sustain their businesses and benefit their communities. In coffee producing countries, many women are abandoned or abused by their husbands, while others are widowed and trying to survive on their own. Many toil at backbreaking labor to eke out a minimal existence for their families in these areas of poverty and lower cultural standards.

By frequenting the Daily Coffee Bar, and purchasing *Café Femenino*, you are helping these new-century pioneers in their quest to improve their daily lives and the status of their communities. Yellowstone Coffee has committed a portion of the proceeds from the sale of this coffee to the Community of Female Growers. So, drink up at the Daily and contribute to a good cause...besides, their coffee tastes better anyway!



### Thank you to recent Donors:

*Thank you all so much for your donations to our "Twenty-two Dollars for Twenty-two Years" fundraising campaign. I am truly overwhelmed by the generous and immediate support shown by all of our friends. It warms my heart to know that you are out there rooting for the Women's Center. Have a wonderful holiday season, for you have enriched ours immensely!*

Al Bertelsen  
Wendy Bianchini  
Phyllis Bock  
Norma Boetel  
Alanna Brown  
Katie Cady  
Ann Cannata  
Community Food Co-op  
Jill Davis  
Mary Jane Disanti  
Geoffrey & Patricia Gamble  
Jeannie Gracey Etgen

Karen Grigry  
Julie Hitchcock  
Glenniss Indreland  
Patty Inskeep  
Linda Karell  
Dr. Colette Kirchhoff  
Langhor's Flowerland  
Mary Lukin  
Michelle Maskiell  
Pat McHenry  
Victoria O'Donnell  
Pat and Bill Oriet  
Adele Pittendrigh  
Rafaella Pulcini  
Darlene Siedschlaw  
Billy Smith  
Christina Tabaczka  
Kathy Tanner  
Martha Tobias  
Verne & Jo Anne Troxel  
Fred & Julie Videon  
Laurel Yost

### Women's Center Book Wish List

Our library relies on the generosity of you donors to keep our resources current. We do save a bit of our budget and money from fundraising each year to purchase new books and magazines, but cannot keep up with the demands of our clients. We have created a wish list of books we have read or heard about that sound relevant to our mission statement, current trends and client interests. If you have any of these books in your library and are entertaining the idea of cleaning your bookshelves out, please consider a donation to the Women's Center library. Or, if you are at the bookstore and feeling extra generous, well, let's just say we wouldn't turn down the gift of a book just because it was brand new!

- *The Gender and Science Reader*: Eds. Muriel Lederman and Ingrid Bartsche
- *The Secret Language of Eating Disorders*: Peggy Claude Pierre
- *Pornography of Representation*: Susanne Kappeler
- *Born to Buy*: Juliet Schor
- *The Thinking Woman's Guide to a Better Birth*: Henri Goer
- *Primal Connections*: Elizabeth Noble
- *Odd Girl Out*: Rachel Simmons
- *Wounds of Passion*: bell hooks
- *Who's Afraid of Feminism? : Serving Through the Backlash* : Eds. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakly



## Book Spotlight

By Aimee Kissel

Winner of the second-annual Montana Book Award, *Hope in Hard Times: New Deal Photographs of Montana, 1936-1942*, portrays history in a touching and personal way. It is written by our very own MSU professor of history, Mary Murphy, and has 140 amazing photographs taken across rural America during the Depression. The pictures were taken by the Farm Security Administration to garner support for New Deal programs and were meant to depict the plight of the average American. Also included are first-hand accounts of people who survived this tough era in Montana's past.

It would be impossible not to be deeply affected by the text and pictures included in *Hope in Hard Times*. The history of Montana is intertwined with the history of the nation and this book tells us the amazing stories of the photographers who spent months on assignment crossing the country and facing hardships themselves. Murphy has successfully captured the spirit and resiliency of the frontier family while giving a glimpse of how the first major government programs affected the people in our state. An exhibit of the 1930's Montana photos will run at the Museum of the Rockies from Jan. 15 through the spring semester. The book can be purchased through Montana Historical Society Press, or checked out from either the Bozeman Public Library or the MSU campus library.

## The (Dreaded?) Holidays: Alternative Gift Ideas for the Children You Love

By Aimee Kissel

Give your niece or nephew or the children of good friends the gift of love by making them a coupon book good for trips to the park or a day out fishing or floating the river. Parents can always use a break, and kids cherish the time you spend with them a lot more than a toy and the benefits are everlasting. If you feel the need to purchase something, consider gifts that encourage physical activity. Find out what type of sports they are interested in and purchase related sports equipment. Ice skates are a great present for Bozeman kids since there are several free ice skating rinks here in town. (Bogert Park, Beall Park behind the Art Center and a new location on College Street.) Swim passes are also a great gift idea that most children would appreciate; you can get passes at either the Swim Center at the high school, or at Bozeman Hot Springs. Better yet, volunteer to go with them and get in and play; you will probably have a great time, and the children's parents will appreciate it more than you know! Movie passes also make a terrific present, and again, you can make an afternoon of it. If you really want to go wild, take them skiing or snowboarding, you might just end up with a free lesson yourself! One last hint: be sure to check with the children's parents before making promises.

## The Women's Center is Open for You

The MSU Women's Center is celebrating its 22<sup>nd</sup> year as an office on campus. This is your Women's Center. We are here to serve all students, faculty, staff and community members. In the Women's Center you will find a welcoming space with room to study and explore. We house a special treasure: the Geraldine Fenn Memorial Library. This cozy little lending library houses over 1900 books primarily by or about women and a wall of fantastic newsletters and magazines. Anyone can check out books for free. Donations of books and magazine subscriptions appropriate to our library are always welcomed. Come and check it out.

When you find our office at 15 Hamilton Hall, our staff will greet you and gladly help you find answers to your questions, tell you about our programs and services, steer you to groups or other organizations that may be helpful, show you a big book full of scholarships for women, invite you to volunteer, or try to meet any other need you might present.

Look for signs about our annual Open House this Fall. But you don't have to wait that long to enjoy your Women's Center, we are open Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.



### Local Women's Resources:

**AIDS Network of Southern Montana**, 582-1110  
**Network Against Sexual and Domestic Abuse** (24-hour Shelter & Crisis Line), 586-4111  
**Bridger Clinic, Inc.** (Reproductive Health Care), 587-0681  
**Career Transitions, Inc.** 388-6701, [careertransition.com](http://careertransition.com)  
**Child Care Connections**, 587-7786  
**HELP Center** (24-Hour crisis line), 586-3333  
**MSU University Police** (24-hour emergency), 994-2121  
**MSU Counseling and Psychological Services**, 994-4531  
**MSU Student Health Services**, 994-2311  
**MSU VOICE Center** (Victim Options In the Campus Environment), 994-7069 (24-hour line)  
**MSU Women's Center**, 994-3836  
**Montana Women Vote! Project**, (406) 543-3550 (Missoula), [montanawomenvote.org](http://montanawomenvote.org)  
**Parents, Family & Friends of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG)**, 723-7251 (Butte), 252-5440 (Billings)  
**PRIDE**, [www.gaymontana.com/pride](http://www.gaymontana.com/pride), 1-800-610-9322  
**QSA: (Queer/Straight Alliance)** Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Questioning, 994-4551  
**The Parent Place**, 587-4734  
**Women's Voices for the Earth**, 406-543-3747 (Missoula)

### *QSA: What's Happening*

*QSA is a campus based student organization for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Questioning and Transgender students, staff and community members and allies in Bozeman. Weekly meetings are held throughout the academic year. These meetings are an opportunity to get to know one another, discuss current issues, offer support and help plan events.*

*All LGBTQ students and community members are welcome at our Monday night meetings as well as parents, friends and allies. Meetings are confidential. To find out where meetings are or to get more information about QSA contact us at 994-4551, or e-mail us at [q-msu@montana.edu](mailto:q-msu@montana.edu), or visit our website at [www.qmsu.montana.edu](http://www.qmsu.montana.edu).*

### SACK LUNCH SEMINARS, SPRING 2005: A PREVIEW

Get these on your calendars now!

**January 26:** *Pilates* with Liz Ann Kudrna, Founder of Body in Balance  
**February 2:** *Natural Medicine and Women's Health* with Dr. Breanna McElgunn, Naturapathic Physician  
**February 9:** *A New Look at Birth Control* with Laura Mentch, Health Educator  
**February 16:** *Blue-eyed/Brown-eyed*, a film viewing and exercise in diversity awareness  
**February 23:** *Feng Shui For Today* with Linda Ford, professional Feng Shui consultant  
**March 2:** *An Introduction to Post-Feminism* with film professor Walter Metz  
**March 23:** *The History and Current State of the Birth Doula Profession, Part II* with Marianne Donch, certified Doula  
**March 30:** *Women, Place and Oral History* with students from Professor Mary Murphy's Humanities Seminar 301 class  
**April 6:** *Sexual Assault Awareness Month* with the VOICE Center and Students Against Sexual Assault



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