Teaching Strategy: “Challenging Media Stereotypes”

Media has become a powerful tool of communication, and is pervasive in our lives though outlets such as broadcast media, film, theatre, the arts, and of course, television, print and web. Whether or not media content is contributing positively to our value systems is debatable. What is not debatable is that that university students will consume up to 7 ½ -10 hours per day of media content, so the need for students to have more skill in disseminating it becomes imperative.

Perhaps no media artifact represents American perceptions of beauty more than the plastic toy doll, Barbie. Barbie is an American cultural icon that is an idealized model of what many young girls (and, yes, some boys) aspire to look like and/or expect in life. These standards are of course not limited to just being thin and beautiful, but also to a particular race, class, and definition of femininity as well. Barbie is not the sole determinant or influence, of course, to how we decide to treat one another, but in order to affect decision-making, in this case about gender, we can show students how they have the power to alter messaging.

This activity asks students to take the iconography of Barbie, and create a new message that challenges the stereotypes ascribed to gender by transforming it into something new.

The assignment calls for:

1) Consideration about how Barbie represents and sets standards for girls, women, and men to aspire to.

2) Modifying the Barbie to challenge these standards.

3) Creativity and effort count! 😊

In addition, you can use television commercials from YouTube to disseminate race, gender, sexuality and ethics!