**Abstract:**
Given the immediacy and availability of advertisements as a function of old, new, and emerging technologies and media, students are exposed to a barrage of images and messages in numbers and ways unseen before and with implications not fully understood or realized. The aim of this assignment is to foster a critical understanding and reception of such messages, especially as they relate to gender, sexuality, race, and their intersections.

**Usage Notes:**
This assignment is designed as a short paper to be completed by an individual student outside of the classroom, but could readily be adapted as an in-class assignment for individual or a group of students. It is also easily adaptable into a longer, more analytical paper.

**Learning Goals and Assessments:**

**Learning Goal 1:** To identify how images portrayed in advertisements construct an idealized notion of femininity and masculinity as well as identifying the power of media and consumerism in shaping everyday life and experiences.

**Assessment 1:** Students will choose eight advertisements in four categories that illustrate the creation and depiction of idealized notions of femininity and masculinity.

**Learning Goal 2:** To analyze the ways that these images are often simultaneously gendered, racialized, sexualized, and heteronormative.

**Assessment 2:** Students will provide written analyses, employing an intersectionality framework, of the ways that these images are often simultaneously gendered, racialized, sexualized, and heteronormative.

**Learning Goal 3:** To realize and appreciate the cumulative and interconnected nature of institutionalized gender-based inequality.

**Assessment 3:** Students will provide written analyses that explore implications for gendered advertisement across multiple institutional realms, such as family life, the paid labor force, education, politics as well as within interactions and for individuals.

**Brief Description**
After viewing Jean Kilbourne’s *Killing Us Softly IV*, students collect four sets of advertisements from the Internet or print media for products targeting female and male consumers in various categories. Students then describe and analyze each ad, using Kilbourne’s work, in addition to other course materials and concepts, as framing and analytic devices.
Explanation
This activity is assigned as a take-home assignment or a short paper. It is relevant to course readings, lectures, and discussions of general sociological concepts including socialization, norms, the sociological imagination, social constructionism, as well as more specific ones, including intersectionality perspective, gender, consumerism, and media literacy.

My students have used this assignment to more deeply interrogate the power of media in shaping gendered perceptions of women and men. Students also have described this assignment as helping them become more discriminating consumers of media and products while also prompting them to educate others about the power of media and the gendered and sexualized messages embedded within various media. In addition, a number of students have been prompted to take more direct action, demonstrating their heightened media literacy and civic engagement, such as contacting television stations, magazine publishers, and corporations, to demand changes in the images and messages embedded within advertisements.

I have used this exercise in the following courses: Principles of Sociology, a lower-division course and Sociology of Gender, an upper-division course. I would also recommend this assignment for use in media, popular culture, race and ethnicity, and social inequality courses.

Assigned Readings and Necessary Materials
*Killing Us Softly IV*, the documentary film by Jean Kilbourne

When teaching this material in a gender course, I recommend that students are assigned relevant readings on social construction theory, beauty myths, intersectionality theory, and/or bodies. Some suggested readings include:

When teaching this material in an introductory course using a traditional textbook or a reader, I recommend that students are assigned relevant chapters on gender and sexuality. Other suggested, complementary readings may include:

When teaching this material in a race and ethnic relations course, I recommend that students are assigned relevant readings on stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, intersectionality theory, white privilege, racialization, and the social construction of race. Some suggested readings include:


When teaching this material in a popular culture or media course, I recommend that students are assigned relevant readings on advertising, consumerism, marketing, media literacy, and semiotics. Some suggested readings include:


When teaching this material in an inequality course, I recommend that students are assigned relevant readings on gender, intersectionality, and media. Some suggested readings include:


**Instructions for Students**

This exercise asks you to analyze and interpret the messages about gender that permeate our lives through the media, using your viewing of Jean Kilbourne's *Killing Us Softly IV* and your readings on gender, race, and social class. Explore the internet and/or magazines and choose one advertisement for an item in each of the following categories:

1. Beer
2. Chocolate
3. Men’s jeans
4. Women’s jeans
5. Women’s fragrance
6. Men’s fragrance
7. A film targeting a male audience
8. A film targeting a female audience

For each of the eight images you choose, analyze messages about what is attractive for both males and females by answering the following questions:

1. What is going on in the ad? Describe it and include a link to or copy of that image.
2. What types of bodies are displayed? What shapes, sizes, colors?
3. What kinds of activities are shown?
4. What does the text say about the images?
5. How do these images reflect the “rules” about male and female beauty in our society? Masculinity and femininity? Do any of the images challenge the rules about male and female beauty? Masculinity and femininity? How so? Be specific about the rules that you are referencing.

Next, compare and contrast the “rules of beauty” in the magazines by answering these questions:
1. What are the similarities and differences between what is required for men and what is required for women?
2. How do you explain these differences and similarities?
3. Besides gender, how do other factors such as race, class, age, sexuality, and sexual orientation seem to affect the rules of beauty in these magazines? Be specific and detailed.

In *Killing Us Softly IV*, Jean Kilbourne explains that the consequences of being objectified in advertisements are different – and more serious – for women than for men. What does your analysis of the images you chose show? How is the world different for women than it is for men? How do the images of women interact with those in our culture differently from the way images of men do? What are the implications of this on individual women? Individual men? What are the implications of this on the decisions that men make about education, careers, romantic relationships, and families? What are the implications of this on the decisions that women make about education, careers, romantic relationships, and families? What about interactions that take place within the realms of education, work, romantic relationships, and families for women? For men?