

Parents TOGETHER

A Newsletter for Greenwich Parents of Adolescents ©
www.parentstogetherct.org

Body Image The Role of the Media by Kathy Steiner

ACCORDING TO Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-trust is the first secret of success." This self-trust is the 'gut' feeling we get in situations that helps us to make the right decision. The instinct, or intuition, is our survival mechanism that helps to keep us safe. It comes from knowing who we are, how we feel, and what we want; it is connected to our sense of respect for ourselves. Self-respect is defined as "a proper respect for oneself as a human being." It is about taking care of ourselves because we are worth the effort. It includes listening to our feelings, clarifying our belief system, and making choices that are right for us. When we take the time to think about our values and priorities, we are more confident in holding true to our beliefs and asserting ourselves.

Courtney Macavinta & Andrea Vander Pluym, co-authors of the book, [RESPECT: A Girl's Guide to Getting Respect & Dealing When Your Line Is Crossed](#), state that our self-respect is enhanced when the following are part of our lives:

1. Self worth: the sense of our own value and worth.
2. Self-acceptance: an acceptance and appreciation of who we are, the way we are.
3. Confidence: the belief that we can do what we set our mind to.
4. Validation: confirming for ourselves that we, and

our feelings, matter and that we hear this from other people.

So how does our self-respect develop? Both nature and nurture help shape us. Internal characteristics and external influences shape our concept of our own self-worth, belief in our self, and our self-respect.

One external factor that influences the way we perceive and feel about ourselves is the media. Mass media including magazines, newspapers, radio, television, movies, music, internet, billboards, and bumper stickers, communicate messages to us in order to create an ideal style, look or image. The media promotes 'beautiful, successful' women who are tall, slender, and seemingly perfect. The average American sees approximately 3,000 advertisements per day: these advertisements sell products to us, the consumer, by focusing on, and idolizing appearances - the perfect face, hair, body, style. The advertising industry spends approximately \$180 billion per year on selling us its values including success, love, romance, sex, and an image that is unattainable by the majority of women viewing the ads. What is presented as "normal" by the mass media boxes women, and men, into being someone or something they may not choose or wish to be. (Jean Kilbourne,

continued on page 2

To our readers

Welcome back! We hope the school year is going well. This is the first newsletter of the 2008 - 2009 calendar; look for others throughout the year. Please contact your school's delegate (see page 7) if you have any questions about the newsletter or our upcoming programs.

Upcoming Programs

November 10: "Discipline in the Elementary Years"

March 2, 2009: "Media and Body Image"

See page 7 for more details.

continued from page 1

"Killing Us Softly 3"; visit www.jeankilbourne.com.)

Media's ideal image - young and flawless - communicates that perfection is what our society values. Advertisements convince us that such transformation is possible if we just try (of course, by using their product). We spend an enormous amount of time, energy, and money in an effort to look like the women in the advertisements, and feel guilty when we fail. This has a profound impact on women's self-esteem, and also on how men feel about, and treat, women. *These media images are impossible to attain because many of them are computer enhanced.* It is common practice for the models in the ads to have inches erased off their thighs, waist or triceps, wrinkles smoothed out on the face and hands, bust-line altered, nose straightened, eyes widened and set farther apart, or hair highlighted. Some ads use women who don't even exist by using one woman's eyes, another woman's nose, another woman's lips until the 'perfect face' is created to sell the image the advertisers are looking for in order to sell their product. (Jean Kilbourne, "Killing Us Softly 3") This beauty transformation using computer enhancement is the focus in the *campaignforrealbeauty.com* video: *Evolution*. As the message states: "No wonder our perception of beauty is distorted."

Does this have an impact on our teenage girls and guys? You can judge for yourself with these sobering statistics from Current Health 2, March 2006:

1. 40% of 17 year-old girls say

they are unhappy with their appearance.

2. 240,682 plastic surgeries in 2004 were on people 18 and under.
3. 70% of body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) cases begin before

Some ads use women who don't even exist by using one woman's eyes, another woman's nose...

age 18. (BDD is an obsession and exaggeration, of a physical trait, that impairs the healthy development of the person's self-esteem, confidence and well-being).

4. 50% increase since 1991 in number of teens who have tried steroids.
5. 35% of people with a binge-eating disorder are male.

So, how can we fight these messages? Media literacy can empower youth to challenge media messages and develop into positive contributors to society that bring about social change.

Critically analyzing media messages is the focus of the elective course, **Body Image and the Media**, offered at Greenwich High School. Through talking, listening, writing, and creating, students challenge society's definition of beauty. Discussion on the concept of inner beauty, and establishing a sense of balance in our lives help us to compare and contrast this positive message with that of the mass media. Students discriminate between the superficial beauty of the ideal media image and the permanent true beauty of one's spirit. They learn to appreciate that beauty

comes in all sizes, shapes and forms.

Three students relate some of their insights: Bianca says: "It's not about being perfect, it's about being responsible." Briana creates a poem which evokes a state of confusion and anger as to how ads deceive us, "... all sizes are in this world, only one is shown. Models look starved as is our culture. Starved for perfection. The ads they deceive us, no one really sees us." Shannon writes

that "... as a high school girl, body image is an important part of my peers' and my life. Although confidence and security come from how a person feels about him/herself, this opinion can sway depending on the images or judgments of the people around him/her. Interestingly enough, making people feel bad about themselves physically, emotionally, or sexually is often what the advertisements aim for ..."

Not only is this course conversation beneficial to girls, it is also beneficial to boys. The male students in my class often state that it is important to hear how their female peers feel about themselves in comparison to advertising images. This discussion helps them realize the significance of their words, attitudes and behaviors toward women, and how it can either enhance or defeat a person's sense of self-worth and self-respect.

The societal image of men to be tough, powerful, aggressive, muscular, successful, and intimidating (sometimes at the expense of their female counterpart), can have a detrimental impact on our

developing boys sense of self-worth. Showing emotions, loving and caring, respecting and communicating are human qualities, not only female qualities. We need to challenge this societal image that has boxed both women and men into a certain look, style or role.

Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed individuals can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." This is the focus of the second half of the **Body Image and the Media** curriculum. Students become activists in order to bring about a positive change in attitude and behavior. They develop a project, to implement for a target audience, to educate about the truth of advertisements and its negative impact on both genders. All but two of my student groups have developed media literacy projects which have focused on educating students in grades 6-9. Surprisingly, the other two groups have focused on educating "aging women!" I asked these two groups, "You mean like me?" and their response was, "Yes!"

Focusing on inner beauty, and truly accepting one's self for who he/she is, is a gift; parents can play a role developing it. Through the partnering of The Dove Self-Esteem Fund and the Girl Scouts of the USA, the programs *Uniquely ME!* and *Mirror, Mirror* have been developed for mothers and daughters, ages 5-17. Dr. Susie Orbach & Dr. Nancy Etcoff, co-authors of [true you! "Sometimes I Feel Ugly" and Other Truths About Growing Up, An Activity Guide for Mothers and Daughters](#), state that "Mom is one of the most important influences in the life of a daughter and her development.

Our love and care set the foundation for our daughter's life. Who we are will profoundly affect who she is and who she will be. How we feel about ourselves, our looks, our body, our beauty will act like a script from which our daughter will make choices about how she should feel about herself. In order to give our daughter the strength and courage she needs to feel beautiful in a world that may challenge her values, we need to take inventory of our own feelings of beauty." Do we communicate an empowerment of being a strong and healthy woman, or do we stress over a few extra pounds and growing another year older?

Listed are **10 Big Steps** to help us feel better about our body - discuss them with your daughter, niece, granddaughter, sister, cousin, girlfriend, husband, son, nephew, grandson, brother, cousin, boyfriend, wife:

1. Appreciate all that your body can do.
2. Make a list of 10 things that you like about yourself that are not related to your looks or weight.
3. Remind yourself that beauty is only skin deep.
4. Look at yourself as a whole person.
5. Surround yourself with positive people.
6. Shut down the voices in your head that say negative things about your body.
7. Wear comfortable clothes that make you feel good about your body.
8. Be a critical viewer of media messages.
9. Do something nice for yourself.
10. Use time that you might spend worrying about your body to do something to help others.

This topic of self-respect, self-esteem, and body image has implications for both our sons and daughters. Consider the barrage of magazine ads and bill boards using sexual images to sell their product; TV shows and movies displaying sex as casual; songs with vulgar and inappropriate lyrics; internet sites that are unregulated and easily accessible make positive healthy development challenging. The next time you and your daughter or son pick up a magazine, look at the advertisements and see if you can tell what they are selling. *Cover up the words if there are any and just focus on the images presented.* What advertising technique is being used to sell the product or service? (Is it sex, sex, and more sex, popularity or wealth, or violence, intimidation and power?) Who is the target audience for the ad? (Is it pre-teens, teenagers, adults, or the elderly? Is it males, females or both genders?) What is the message that is being communicated and the impact on its audience? (You are not pretty enough unless you use this product? Your life will be a whole lot better if you use this product/service?)

Open, honest, and loving communication between parents and children is a must. Our words, attitudes and actions send messages to our children that remain with them. Check out the *campaignforrealbeauty.com* video. And be happy, be healthy, be beautiful.



Kathy Steiner teaches Wellness Education at Greenwich High School. She lives in Greenwich with her husband and two children. Kathy will be the featured speaker at the Parents Together Program on March 2, 2009.

Manners Matter

At Every Age, In Every Situation

A Conversation with Michele O'Reilly

AS Founder and Director of the Connecticut School of Etiquette, Michele O'Reilly knows the importance of manners. Recently *Parents Together* caught up with Michele to ask her for some advice.

Parents Together: Many parents today comment that their children are not "polite." Do you think that this is a generational condition or are we, as parents, not focusing on the importance of manners as much as our parents did?

Michele O'Reilly: I believe it to be the result of both factors, a generational condition as well as not having the time to focus on the importance of manners.

Teaching manners requires time and patience. It is often a "thankless" job until your child grows into an adult and realizes the greatest gift you gave them...a sense of respect, character, integrity, accountability and civility. Having good manners means more than placing your napkin on your lap or eating your soup correctly. Manners are taught as much by parents' actions as by their words.

In today's society, parents and children are extremely busy. There is less time for sit down family meals every night with polite conversation, fewer two parent

households. We have road rage, and images in the media promoting rudeness as acceptable and entertaining. Until recently there was a rebellion of sorts against formality and tradition. What parents are realizing today is that good manners are neither pretentious nor outdated, but practical and necessary for increased self-esteem and overall personal and interpersonal success.

Good manners have been made more complicated by advances in technology. Handwritten thank you's are being replaced by emails and text messages. Face-to-face meetings are less common than a phone call. In some ways, we have depersonalized relationships while increasing our technical knowledge.

... a common complaint I hear from parents involves a sense of entitlement...

PT: As a professional what do you see most commonly in terms of "bad manners?"

MO'R: I have had the pleasure of working with many kind, bright, civic-minded children. They are

goal oriented, multi-faceted and hard working. But a common complaint I hear from parents involves a sense of entitlement along with the ever-present lack of table manners.

PT: Is it ever too early to start teaching manners? Where/how do you suggest parents start?

MO'R: It is never too early to start teaching manners and planting the seeds of good manners. You teach your children manners by your actions and words, e.g. how you treat your spouse, friends, family and complete strangers. Well mannered, polite children grow into well mannered, polite adults. I believe if you are kind, considerate and respectful of others, your children will mirror

that behavior. If you make it a point to hold the door for others to walk through; send a thank you note for a gift received; and conduct yourself in a manner that makes you "stand out" not "stick out," your children will learn to be grateful, respectful

and kind. These are the lessons that will speak volumes to children. How to hold a knife and fork is important but will mean little if the fundamental principles are lacking.

PT: Is it ever too late to start

teaching manners? What do you suggest to parents of ill-mannered/impolite teens?

MO'R: It is never too late to start teaching manners. Communication with your teens is key. Parents need to talk with their teens and let them know what behaviors and attitudes are acceptable and unacceptable. Teens need to understand that how they treat others is a reflection on their character. Manners provide empowerment and confidence.

As far as impolite teens are concerned, typically the most common complaint is the lack of respect in public places, including the use of cell phones and generally loud behavior. One example of this is in movie theaters where teens will talk loudly with friends, they use cell phones and will interrupt the silence, they put their feet on the seats in front of them and leave garbage for someone else to pick up. Basic courtesies such as saying "please," "thank you" and "excuse me" should be mastered by this age.

PT: With all the mobile technology at our children's disposal, it's not uncommon to see young people (actually this goes for parents too!) talking on their cell phones or texting at restaurants. What are your thoughts on appropriate use of cell phones/ipods etc. in company?

MO'R: If you are with company

and you receive a cell phone call or text message that you feel you have to take, at the very least, ask permission to take the call or respond to the text. Otherwise you are sending the message that the call is more important than

...good manners are neither pretentious nor outdated, but practical and necessary...

staying engaged with your present company. Get to know your phone and its features so that you can use the "vibrate" mode when in a restaurant, theater, place of worship, etc. Take the call away from the table to a place that is less likely to invade the space of others. Be brief and be considerate. Also, know that tapping on a Blackberry is as distracting to some as speaking on a cell phone.

PT: Please describe the kinds of programs or courses you offer .

MO'R: We offer courses for children, teens, young adults and professionals. We cover topics such as introductions, meeting and greeting, telephone/cell phone etiquette, thank you notes, table manners, "aceing" the college or professional interview and more. You can visit our website at www.morethanmanners.com for upcoming events and programs.

PT: Do you have any specific

stories or anecdotes you could share to illustrate the importance of manners?

MO'R: I received a thank you note from a student who said despite being shy, good manners made her feel more comfortable especially around new people.

Another client relayed that she was on the brink of firing her landscaping company because she felt they were not doing a great job. Around the holidays, she received an amaryllis plant. "Each day the kids came into my office

to see how much it had grown or if a new bulb had blossomed. It really provided us much enjoyment." Due to the thoughtful gesture as a thank you for her patronage, she did not go looking for a new company. Instead, she took the time to call the company and discuss her concerns which resulted in a mutually beneficial relationship.

While conducting a dining program, I had a young gentleman in his 20's quietly rise from his seat when the woman next to him excused herself from the table. He rose again when she arrived back to the table. The older gentlemen chuckled and thought he was putting on an act. He turned to them quite proudly and said "My grandmother always taught me that a gentleman rises for a lady." By the end of the class the other men were following suit.

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The mother of five children, Michele O'Reilly lives in Southport.

Our Heartfelt Thanks

Since 1979 *Parents Together* has been committed to the mission: "To give parents the opportunity to come together to **communicate** parenting concerns; **share** parenting skills and insights; **support** each other in making sound decisions about their children's activities; **learn** new skills for being more effective, loving parents."

Your donations are continuously needed to fund our newsletters and programs. Our sincere thanks to the contributors listed below whose gifts were received recently.

Workshops – \$1000 or more

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Greenwich Country Day School
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Community Notes

Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI)

PLTI seeks to enable adults (parents and extended family) to become leading advocates for children. The cornerstones of the program are respect, validation, and a belief that, when the tools of democracy are understood, the public will actively engage in civic life.

Developed through the CT Commission on Children, PLTI is an intensive leadership program: beginning with an all day retreat, it runs for 20 weeks with childcare and family dinner provided. College credit is available. An application and interview are necessary to be considered for the training which is offered free of charge to participants.

For more information contact Mary Ann Murray at 413-8490 or Jenny Byxbee at 869-2221.

Parents Helping Parents (PHP)

PHP was established in Greenwich by some mothers of adolescents who were encountering difficulties beyond the typical parenting challenges. Since its inception, PHP has grown to include fathers and now has members from other towns, primarily in Westchester and Fairfield Counties. The group sponsors free monthly meetings in Greenwich. PHP also hosts meetings for parents of children who are 18 years or older and sponsors workshops covering issues faced by member families. The group maintains active email communication to notify members of relevant programs and resources, and provides a way for members to obtain feedback from other PHP parents about their specific issues.

PHP helps parents understand that they are not alone and that there are resources available to help deal with their challenging children. At meetings, parents are able to share their concerns in a confidential atmosphere and tap into the wide network of professional resources including therapists, addiction counselors and educational consultants that are available to help with the variety of issues faced by the children.

For more information and details about the meetings, please call Susan at 273-8505 or Lynn at 249-3877.

Parents Together 2008–2009

Delegates

Parents Together's strength as an organization stems from its effort to address broad parenting issues on a townwide basis, and narrower topics specific to individual schools.

Making sure this happens are delegates from every public and independent elementary, middle and upper school in Greenwich. Please share with your delegates the parenting issues that are on your mind so that they can tailor programs to best fit the needs of your school community. *Parents Together* thanks the following parents who have generously volunteered to serve as delegates in their schools this year

Brunswick School
Maryellen Feeley & Jane Shang

Central Middle School
Amy Bibb, Laura Knoeller & Mamie Lee

Convent of the Sacred Heart
Rhonda Morley

Cos Cob School
Lisa Edmundson

Eagle Hill
Cindy Leaman

Eastern Middle School
Emma King

Glenville School
Carol Fox

Greenwich Academy
Allyson Cowin & Nicole Heath

Greenwich Catholic School
Sheelah Morrisey Quinn

Greenwich Country Day School
Cary Keigher & Karen Marache

Greenwich High School
Amy Denton

Hamilton Avenue School
Patty Reilly

International School at Dundee
Suzanne Deschamps

Julian Curtiss School
Louise Salzer

Mead School
TBA

New Lebanon School
Laura Turley

North Mianus School
Siobhan O'Connor

North Street School
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Old Greenwich School
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Upcoming Programs

All programs are held in the Cone Room at Greenwich Town Hall and start at 9:15 AM unless otherwise specified. They are free and open to the public.

November 10

Mary Ellen Doyle Markowitz, LCSW, will present "**Discipline During the Elementary Years**". She will discuss how to get your child to stop unwanted behaviors, and how to shape the behavior you want while encouraging responsibility and resiliency.

March 2, 2009

Kathy Steiner will present "**Girls and the Impact of the Media**". Greenwich High School Wellness Education teacher and coach Ms Steiner will delve into how to help preserve our girls' self-esteem and sense of self in the face of unrealistic images presented on television, magazines, catalogs and video.

Parents Together extends a special thank you to **Linda Layman** for her contribution to the organization and her many years of help with the Greenwich High School mailing of the *Parents Together* newsletters. THANK YOU, Linda!

Who We Are

Parents Together is an independent, nonprofit organization in Greenwich, CT, that offers ongoing opportunities for parents to communicate, share, support and learn together. We work in cooperation with the Parent Teacher Associations of the public, private and parochial schools in town. The *Parents Together* organization and delegates from Greenwich schools plan programs for parents in grades K-12. We also publish two quarterly newsletters: *Parents Together Primer*, for parents of children from birth through fifth grade, and *Parents Together*, for parents of adolescents.

Distribution: *Parents Together Primer* is distributed to parents through their children's preschools and elementary schools. *Parents Together* is sent to parents of children in grades 6 through 12 in all Greenwich public and independent schools.

Newsletter Subscriptions and Correspondence: We invite parents and all other readers interested in local parenting issues to subscribe to either or both newsletters. For an **annual subscription**, please indicate which newsletter you wish to receive, and send your name, address and \$12 for each subscription with a check payable to *Parents Together*, to P. O. Box 4843, Greenwich, CT 06831-0417. Correspondence may be mailed to the same address.

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New Laws for Teen Drivers

All Learner's Permit holders who obtain a driver's permit on or after August 1, 2008 are required to:

- ♦ pass a 25-question knowledge test to obtain the permit.
- ♦ have at least 40 hours of behind-the-wheel training before applying for their driver's license.
- ♦ complete an eight-hour safe driving course.
- ♦ have their parents or legal guardians complete a two-hour class concerning teen driving laws.

In addition: For the entire time a driver holds a Learner's Permit, he or she may not have any passengers except for:

- ♦ a licensed driving instructor giving instruction; **OR**
- ♦ one person who is providing instruction and is at least 20 years old, has held a driver's license for four or more consecutive years and whose license has not been suspended during the four years prior to training; **AND**
- ♦ his or her parents or legal guardian, at least one of whom holds a valid driver's license.

Drivers who receive a license on or after August 1, 2008 have the following restrictions:

Curfew: 11 p.m. to 5 a.m.- unless the teen is traveling for employment, school, religious activities, medical necessity, or is an assigned driver in the Safe Rides Program.

Passenger Restrictions: During the first six months the newly licensed driver may not have any passengers in the vehicle except for:

- ♦ a licensed driving instructor giving instruction; **OR**
- ♦ his or her parents or legal guardian, at least one of whom holds a valid driver's license; **OR**
- ♦ one person who is providing instruction and is at least 20 years old, has held a driver's license for four or more consecutive years and whose license has not been suspended during the four years prior to training.

During the second six months (months seven through twelve) the only additional passengers allowed in the vehicle are members of the driver's immediate family.

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For more information visit: www.ct.gov/dmv

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