Going Against the Grain: Gender-specific Media Education in Catholic High Schools

Yvette V. Lapayese
Loyola Marymount University, California

The Catholic Church has addressed the power of media, as well as the critical importance of understanding and educating Catholic youth on the media's role and place in modern culture. In this article, the narratives of female Catholic teachers are prioritized to illustrate how gender-specific media education influences the school experiences of female high school youth. Eleven Catholic teachers participated in critical media literacy workshops to address the need to both understand and counter the powerful and often dangerous media messages targeted at girls. This is an exploratory study attempting to understand the possibilities of gender-specific education for our Catholic youth. A media literacy framework provides the lens through which the researcher analyzes the data and asserts that gender-specific media education provides a space for Catholic girls to engage in academic and faith-based acts of inquiry in innovative and relevant ways. As a result, gender-specific media education sets the stage for the development of female Catholic voices.

Youth spend an average of seven hours per day interacting with a wide range of media, including television, magazines, videos games, books, radio, the Internet, and cell phones (Lenhart, Madden, MacGill, & Smith, 2007; Livingstone & Bovill, 2001; Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005). Younger generations are often described as "screenagers" instead of "teenagers" because they mediate some type of screen often and simultaneously (Rushkoff, 2006). In a typical week, 81% of teens report that they engage in some form of media multitasking, using more than one form of media at one time (Foehr, 2006).

For teen girls and adult women, media consumption can be particularly dangerous. According to Liebau (2007), female adolescents are expected to navigate through society saturated by media messages related to sex, sex appeal, and pornography. Thus, it becomes essential for women and girls to think critically about media because of its influence on how women are depicted and judged within the social structures of society. Essentially, the images of young women in media have real life impact (Durkin & Paxton, 2002; Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998; Gapinski, Brownell, & LaFrance, 2003).

Against this backdrop, the Catholic Church has addressed the power of media, as well as the critical importance of understanding and educating Catholic youth on the media's role and place in modern culture. As early as 1971, the Second Vatican Council on the Means of Social Communications issued the challenge:

> The Church considers it to be one of her most important tasks to provide the means for educating recipients of the media in Christian principles. Catholic schools and organizations cannot ignore the urgent duty they have in this field…This sort of training must be given regular place in school curricula. It must be given, and systematically, at every stage of education." (Order of the Second Vatican Council, 1971, p. 13)

Despite the Catholic Church's stance on the critical need for media education in K-12 Catholic schools, very little research exists on how media education impacts schooling for Catholic youth. In this article, the narratives of female Catholic teachers are prioritized to illustrate how gender-specific media education influences the experiences of female high school students. Eleven Catholic teachers participated in critical media literacy workshops to address the need to investigate and resist the powerful and often dangerous media messages targeted at girls. This is an exploratory study attempting to understand the possibilities of gender-specific education for our Catholic youth. A media literacy framework provides the lens through which the researcher analyzes the data and asserts that gender-specific media education provides a space for Catholic girls to engage in academic and faith-based acts of inquiry in innovative and relevant ways. As a result, gender-specific media education sets the stage for the development of female Catholic voices.

Media Education

Media education often refers to an inquiry-based pedagogic model that provides tools to help students critically analyze media messages. It offers opportunities for learners to broaden their experience of media and helps them develop creative skills in making their own media message (Kellner & Share, 2007, p. 3). Media education is often conceptualized as a way to address the negative dimensions of mass media, popular culture, and digital media, including media violence, gender and racial stereotypes, the sexualization of children, and concerns about cyberbullying and Internet predators. Media education

expands the construct of literacy, treating mass media, popular culture, and digital media as new types of "texts" that require critical analysis. This transforms the process of media consumption into an active and critical process whereby students gain greater awareness of the potential for misrepresentation and manipulation, and understand the role of mass media and participatory media in constructing alternative views of reality (Masterman, 1998; McLaren, Hammer, Sholle, & Reilly, 1995; Luke, 1997).

In addition, media education is actively focused on the instructional methods and pedagogy of media literacy, integrating theoretical and critical frameworks rising from constructivist learning theory, media studies, and cultural studies scholarship. According to Thoman (2003), students develop the ability to interpret and create personal meaning out of the images, sounds, and words from the media. As such, media education in the classroom creates communities of active readers who can decide for themselves how they wish to interact with complex media contexts (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Kellner & Share, 2007).

Academically, research suggests that critical media literacy enhances the teaching and learning of other subject areas in the classroom (Comber & Nixon, 2005; Goodman, 2003; Morrell, 2004, 2008). For instance, Hobbs & Frost (2003) maintain that many of the skills involved in media analysis can also improve reading comprehension. "Analyzing the setting, speech, thoughts, and dialogue in a film scene may help students understand, identify, and evaluate those elements of character development in literature" (p. 333). Taken together, media education for learners today potentially enables Catholic youth to see and understand media messages as digital narratives, as opposed to truths, while simultaneously enhancing their academic experiences.

Catholic Church and Media Education

Responding to the Catholic Church's stance on media education, in 1982 the Department of Communication and Education of the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) developed *The Media Mirror: A Study Guide on Christian Values and Television*. This project was eventually revised and distributed to schools by the National Catholic Education Association. In 1984 the study guide was piloted in 10 dioceses—Boston, Dubuque, Newark, Oakland, Orlando, Paterson, Portland (Oregon), Providence, St. Paul-Minneapolis, and St. Petersburg-Tampa—and included 14,000 student participants (Schropp, 1982, p. 4). The purpose of USCC's *Media Mirror* was sixfold: (1) to develop an

understanding of the role and influence of television; (2) to foster constructive use of television and related media; (3) to cultivate a better understanding of Christian values as portrayed in popular culture; (4) to develop viewers who will utilize choices in television programming; (5) to educate viewers to upgrade the quality of television programming; and (6) to develop a national media education program reflecting Christian values. Thus, the primary goal of *Media Mirror* was to develop a set of guidelines that would stimulate students to think critically about what they viewed on television in light of Christian morals.

Additionally, in 1989, Catholic activist Sr. Elizabeth Thoman established the Center for Media and Values (CMV), an organization supported largely by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. CMV aimed to generate an "informed citizenry that could understand, interpret, analyze, and evaluate the powerful images, words, and sounds" that made up the contemporary culture (Silverblatt & Eliceiri, 1997, p. 29). The CMV's objective was threefold: (1) to promote a new way of thinking about the influence and impact of mass media in our time; (2) to develop new curriculum resources for educating adults and young people to become more knowledgeable and selective media users; and (3) to develop and promote a vision and a practical program for media literacy in the United States. CMV, like USCC's *Media Mirror* earlier, was established to promote media education as a means of exposing students to misrepresentation and manipulation in the media.

Furthermore, as recently as 2007, Pope Benedict released multiple messages related to the critical imperative of media education in Catholic schools. He emphasized teaching Catholic students skills of discernment, aesthetics, and moral excellence. He added,

> Any trend to produce programs and products—including animated films and video games—which in the name of entertainment exalt violence and portray anti-social behavior or the trivialization of human sexuality is a perversion, all the more repulsive when these programs are directed at children and adolescents. How could one explain this 'entertainment' to the countless innocent young people who actually suffer violence, exploitation, and abuse? (Pope Benedict XVI, 2007, para. 8)

Gender-specific Media Education

Media interacts with girls differently, and it is important that schools respond

to the negative and harmful consequences of media for girls in particular (Hammer & Kellner, 2009). Girls are bombarded with images of women as powerless, passive victims noted primarily for their bodies and sex rather than their mind. These constant media images and messages surrounding sexualization, objectification, and gender stereotypes directly contribute to girls' lack of self-confidence and body image, as well as depression and eating disorders (American Psychological Association, 2010). For instance, clothing companies use the media to encourage teen girls to purchase skimpy clothing to fulfill either a "look" of punk or innocent. During the formative years of adolescents, it may be more difficult for young girls to define their own value and discover their own worth with selections that are predetermined (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 18).

In response to negative media messages, several media organizations have emerged to infuse gender-specific media education in schools. For example, TVbyGIRLS, a nonprofit media education program for girls ages 10 to 18, equips participants with the skills to analyze and create stories and messages portraying young women as passionate and thinking (http://www.tvbygirls.tv/the_site/home.htm). Participants are matched with female media professionals to produce films educating their families and communities about the issues facing women. Another program, Reel Grrls, is a community-based nonprofit in Seattle, Washington, designed to empower teenage girls from diverse backgrounds with leadership development and skill-building in animation, cinematography, and scriptwriting, as a means of realizing their power to influence through media production (http://www.reelgrrls.org/about/overview). Reel Grrls also believes in mentoring and role modeling, and matches its teen participants with media professionals. In sum, gender-specific media programs aim to increase self-esteem, define authentic leadership roles, build critical thinking skills, and enable young women to take control of their own identities, vision, and contribution to society.

Gender-specific media education combines cultural and feminist studies to emphasize the political possibilities of media education in classrooms. For instance, Luke (1994) recognizes how different standpoints, or ways of knowing, allow students to contest and mediate media representations and misrepresentations. Through standpoints, students are able to analyze how, through the inclusion of some groups and exclusion of others, representations benefit dominant and positively represented groups while they simultaneously disadvantage marginalized and subordinate ones. Standpoints allow students to unveil the political and social construction of knowledge, and

also address principles of equity and social justice related to representation.

Luke (1997) argues that it is the teacher's responsibility within the classroom to make visible the power structure of knowledge and how it benefits some more than others. She insists "that a commitment to social justice and equity principles should guide the media educator's work in enabling students to come to their own realizations that, say, homophobic, racist or sexist texts or readings, quite simply, oppress and subordinate others" (p. 44).

This study highlights the need to examine how gender-specific media education plays out in the classroom. Gender-specific media education ultimately serves as a means of exposing girls to the negative dimensions of mass media and the possibilities of utilizing media to offer alternative standpoints.

Research Design, Settings, and Participants

In *Feminism and Methodology*, Sandra Harding (1987) makes a clear distinction between methodology and method. The former she defines as "a theory and analysis of how research does and should proceed," and the latter she defines as a "technique for or a way of proceeding in gathering evidence" (Harding, 1987, pp. 2-5).

For this exploratory study, feminist standpoint theory is utilized so as to highlight the central role that women's voices play in understanding gender-specific media education in Catholic schools. Feminist standpoint theory revolves around three principle claims: (1) knowledge is socially situated; (2) marginalized groups are socially situated in ways that make it more possible for them to be aware of things and ask questions than it is for the nonmarginalized; and (3) research, particularly that focused on power relations, should begin with the lives of the marginalized (Haraway, 1998; Harding, 1991; Hill-Collins, 1990).

There is a consensus among feminist standpoint theorists that a standpoint is not merely a perspective that is occupied simply by being a woman. Put another way, whereas a perspective is situated within one's socio-historical position, and may well provide the starting point for the emergence of a standpoint, a standpoint is earned through the experience of political struggle (Harding, 2004). In this study, I present the standpoint(s) of 11 Catholic high school teachers engaged in gender-specific media education for Catholic female youth.

Methods

This article is based on an 18-month exploratory study that attempts to investigate media education's impact on the teaching and learning of gender-specific media for one population of Catholic youth by focusing on the perceptions of the teachers. The research question that guided this inquiry was: How do female Catholic teachers understand the influence of gender-specific media education on the educational experiences of female Catholic students?

Participants

The standpoints of female Catholic teachers are a critical starting point in understanding how gender-specific media education plays out in Catholic schools. Teacher selection occurred in a master's educational program with an emphasis on technology. This program is offered by a School of Education at a Catholic University through a partnership with a local archdiocese. It is open to candidates who are currently working as full-time educators in Catholic schools within the archdiocese. All teacher participants took a course on cultural diversity, which included a media education core component. The course has a 3-hour seminar and a 1-hour lab requirement each week. The readings and lectures drew upon cultural studies, feminism, film, critical race and critical pedagogy theories, and practices to advance media education. The teachers participated in a total of five media education workshops.

As a result of the workshops in media education, a small group of self-identified feminist Catholic teachers emerged determined to formally implement gender-specific media education in their classrooms. The 11 Catholic teachers—all working in Catholic high schools—demonstrate a track record of advocating for feminist principles in their personal and professional lives. For instance, several of the teachers participated in women's advocacy groups during their college years. In addition, the teachers infused discussions related to gender in various ways throughout their teaching career.

Each of the teachers committed to infuse gender-specific media education in their curricula for a minimum of one academic year while teaching a wide variety of classes at their respective school sites. The teachers came from a variety of disciplines, including history, political science, religion, economics, art, and English. They also taught a variety of grade levels with their respective high schools, including one 12th grade teacher, five 11th grade teachers, three 10th grade teachers, and two ninth grade teachers.

Interviews and Observations

The study involved periodic interviews interspersed with classroom observation sessions. This enabled the researcher to question the teachers and verify perceptions and patterns to understand how female Catholic teachers understand the impact of gender-specific media education on the educational experiences of female Catholic students.

The interviews took two forms: three individual interviews and one focus group interview. First, the researcher conducted an open-ended, unstructured individual interview with each teacher to explore her understandings of the possibilities and limitations of gender-specific media education in Catholic settings. This was then followed by a semi-structured individual interview based on results from the first series of interviews.

Further, the results from the individual interviews determined what the researcher would look for and record during classroom observations. Each teacher was observed delivering one gender-specific media lesson. Each lesson ranged from 2 hours to a few days. Field notes were taken during each observation. Specifically, the researcher took field notes describing the teaching and learning of the lessons and how the teachers and students worked together. After patterns emerged in the observational data, another round of individual semi-structured interviews was conducted, asking the teachers about these patterns and why they thought they were occurring.

Lastly, the researcher held a focus group interview with five of the teachers. These five teachers were interested in discussing the topic of gender, media literacy, and Catholic education with a group of like-minded educators. The focus group provided an important space for the teachers to connect with other teachers who advocate for gender and media education. The data from the focus group interview supported and extended some of the themes emerging in the individual interviews.

Data Analysis

All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. As outlined by Marshall and Rossman (2010), the researcher used the following phases to support the data analysis process. First the researcher immersed herself in the data, reading through written interview data and field notes multiple times to clearly comprehend participants' experience in the study. Second, the researcher generated categories and themes within a media education framework. The researcher

questioned and reflected on the data collected, identifying key patterns in answers from participants. Third, the researcher coded the data, abbreviating patterns seen in the data and standardizing and adjusting those abbreviations as new understandings emerged. Lastly, the researcher wrote analytic memos and jotted all synthesized conclusions drawn from the data to form assertions.

The perspectives of female Catholic teachers implementing gender-specific media education are presented through direct quotations and vignettes, and tied together through interpretive analysis (Emerson et al., 1995; Erickson, 1986).

Findings and Discussion

Female Catholic teachers concurred that gender-specific media education influenced the educational experiences of female Catholic students. Specifically, the teachers perceived that gender-specific media education provided a space for Catholic girls to engage academic and faith-based acts of inquiry in innovative and relevant ways. As a result, gender-specific media education set the stage for the development of female Catholic voices. In the following sections, qualitative descriptions of the influence of gender-specific media education are provided based on individual interviews, a focus group interview, and media lesson observations.

Gender-specific Media Education Enriches the Academic Space for Catholic Girls

The 11 teachers were clear that the lessons on gender-specific media education influenced the overall classroom learning experience. Specifically, the teachers felt that media education enhanced the classroom experience through the development of critical thinking skills and research aptitudes, and the reconfiguring of the teacher-student relationship.

To begin, from the perspective of the teachers, they all felt that gender-specific media education actually pushed their students to think about gender in deep and critical ways. Critical thinking can be defined as the ability to identify and challenge assumptions, to search for alternative ways of thinking, and to summarize a reflective analysis. One teacher asserted:

> It feels like a college classroom in here when we talk about these [gender] topics. In some ways I think I am preparing my girls for the kinds

of conversations they are going to have in college. I mean, that's what college was like for me. You are valued for being critical and for thinking of issues and problems in a new way.

Interestingly, these critical thinking skills spilled over into other subject areas. For example, one English teacher stated:

The same skills you would need to analyze a text of Emerson run along the same line as the skills you would need to analyze media. The girls would sometimes refer back to the media lesson and look at literature with a new lens in how the female characters are portrayed…You have no short supply of sexism in literature. We're reading stuff that dates back to the early 1900s and it's pretty cool to see the girls make those connections.

Another teacher added:

It feels good for me as a teacher to allow these girls time to critically think about media. I see how they are using their minds in much the same they would use their minds to talk about political science or world religions or sociology. They write and they read and they present their findings. If I could say anything about media education is that it has made my classroom a more intellectual classroom.

In addition, observations revealed the high school girls engaged in several academic aptitudes that enabled them to successfully deconstruct and reconstruct the media texts. These included research; reading high-level articles published in research journals; exposure to other disciplines, like feminism and cultural studies; analytical writing; oral presentation skills; collaborating in research teams; synthesis; and conducting literature reviews.

The link between media literacy and academic literacy has been well researched (Comber & Nixon, 2005; Goodman, 2003; Hobbs & Frost, 2004; Morrell, 2004, 2008). For example, studies have investigated the potential of drawing upon youth engagement with hip-hop culture to teach critical reading, literary analysis, and the production of expository and creative writing; the use of court trials to teach argumentative writing in secondary English classrooms; and the use of film critique as bridge to literary analysis (Macedo & Steinberg, 2007). One teacher concluded:

I finally can hear these girls talk in a passionate way. Once they get that thinking at a higher level can go beyond subjects like history, it's like a light switch goes on. The way these girls can question media images and messages really empowers them to question other things they read in their textbooks and that they deal with in life as females.

In addition to enhancing the academic curriculum, gender-specific media education nuanced the relationship between teacher and student in that students relied less on the authority of the teacher. One reason for this was that the students were savvier about the content than the teachers. One teacher pointed out:

When you talk about media to high school girls, they are going to talk about pop culture. I don't know all the popular songs and shows they are watching. They do. They are the experts and so sometimes I am the learner and they are the teacher.

In the focus group interview, the teachers agreed that teaching and learning was a fluid process where all the individuals in the classroom took on different roles at different times. One teacher revealed:

At first it was a little scary, I mean I am not used to sitting back and letting my students kind of take control over what we are going to talk about. What I learned was that some really good learning was taking place because I did let go. I really underestimated what they could do and how much they had to say and process about gender.

As evidenced by the teachers, most of the media education lessons were "taught" by the students themselves. The teachers were increasingly comfortable with the girls' willingness to take ownership of the classroom in real ways. One teacher professed, "It's amazing to see these young women think and speak in such powerful ways. They take charge because they are learning about issues that matter to them."

Luke (1994) contends that a student-centered, bottom-up approach is necessary for media education. In other words, by tapping into the student's own culture, knowledge, and experiences, there is a shifting community of knowers in the classroom. Thus, gender-specific media education potentially restructures authority in the classroom, permitting female students to lead rel-

evant discussions and embrace the higher level of academic reflection.

**Gender-specific Media Education Influences
Catholic Girls' Engagement in Their Faith**

In the classroom, media lessons observed covered a range of topics, including body image, sexuality, and consumption. Gender-specific media lessons included gendered stereotypes and video games; an examination of plastic surgery and plastic surgery advertisements; an examination of Gossip Girl; depictions of homosexuality in consumer media; and hyper-sexualization of girls in media, to name a few. These lessons effectively prompted an elevated level of analysis and self-assessment among the girls vis-à-vis their faith.

To begin, some teachers reported that the gender-specific lessons related back to faith in innovative ways in that the girls were able to talk about the uniqueness of being a Catholic female in a digital age where girls are hyper-sexualized and objectified (American Psychological Association, 2010). One teacher claimed:

> In Catholic schools we spend quite a bit of time talking about how to be generous and accepting of others, and how to value our own worth and the worth of others. But when you turn on the television, those are not the messages. Girls are taught to be jealous, to be catty, [and] to be manipulative. My girls were able to label these behaviors and demonstrate how they contradict being Catholic.

According to these teachers, by exposing the girls to problematic media images and reinforcing their Catholic values, the girls were able to gain greater awareness of images and develop their own interpretations of the themes that they identified, rather than the passive acceptance of what the media portrayed. This skill in engaging media addresses the Catholic Church's objectives for media education, which are to cultivate a critical understanding of media in light of Catholic values (Center for Media Literacy, 2002). One teacher affirmed:

> When we were looking at how girls are depicted in music videos—that they are silent, that they are barely dressed, that they are at the mercy of the male singer, the discussion becomes about exploitation and sexism. My girls knew that these images are counter to the teachings of the Church. So, human dignity became a big issue for us.

Furthermore, a significant component of the interplay between gender-specific media education and Catholic faith was the emphasis of the affective alongside the academic. Discussions were both emotional and spiritual. According to participants, the girls in the classrooms identified with the topics based on either personal experience or the experiences of their peers. As a result, the lessons provided opportunities for the girls to deepen their gender and faith consciousness, though not without struggle, contradiction, and painful dialogue. One teacher asserted:

> I have to say that my girls really sometimes feel a disconnect with the Catholic Church. They so desperately want to talk about what it means to be a Catholic girl in this day and age. It's not so black and white anymore and I think they have really important things to say. I remember one of my students just crying after we talked about how girls feel so much pressure to dress slutty. This girl was so worried about the fact that being the good Catholic girl just didn't bring you attention from boys. So what do you do with that?

One of the ways that teachers and students were able to make sense of the tensions between media depictions and their faith was through the development of female Catholic voices. According to the teachers in this study, the students were able to begin a process of reflecting on their female Catholic standpoints vis-à-vis the media. In several of the lessons, the teachers and students discussed what it means to be a young Catholic female in present-day society. One teacher asserted:

> Being a Catholic girl is very difficult right now. You just don't have Catholic media examples that at least give them some alternatives that are not out of touch with where they are right now. These are girls [who] want to figure out their own unique way of being Catholic and being female and I think that starting with gender and media can help them in that process.

In one classroom observation on the topic of the objectification of women in magazine advertisements, several of the girls initiated blogs that melded gender with faith. These girls used social networking sites to tell a different story from the standpoint of a female Catholic student, thus initiating the development of female faith-based voices. In the focus group interview, the

teachers discussed how their students struggled with the objectification of the female body in mainstream media. One teacher pointed out a blog her student created to counter dominant ways society emphasizes the body at the expense of the spirit. The teachers articulated that their students were able to start a process of nuancing and interrogating what it means to be both female and Catholic in the digital age.

In another lesson on body image, the students crafted a survey on body satisfaction and disseminated it among their high school peers. Interestingly, of the 98 Catholic girls surveyed, only three were completely satisfied with their body and all 98 had dieted at one point in their young lives. As a result of the survey, the small group of girls started an after-school girl club to provide a meaningful, safe, and faith-based space to discuss these issues from their standpoints.

Challenges in Implementing Gender-Specific Media Education

Although the Catholic teachers identified a wide variety of benefits and positive results, there appeared to be significant challenges to gender-specific media education in Catholic schools. Gender-specific media education played out unevenly and underground in these school settings and fell short of more critical feminist analyses.

In regard to its unevenness, certain issues were more acceptable to discuss in the Catholic schools than others. For instance, the teachers felt very comfortable co-constructing lessons that addressed body image; however, they felt far less comfortable addressing issues like sexual orientation with their students. One teacher explained, "I knew that if I was going to address how lesbians are portrayed in the media, I would have to be very careful. Even though we have a strong lesbian teaching staff, it just isn't openly discussed."

Unfortunately, gender-specific media education was not enthusiastically supported at most of the school sites, presenting another significant challenge for the teachers. Catholic administrators were skeptical of the utility of such lessons. Out of the 11 teachers involved in this study, seven of them felt unsupported by their administrators. They concurred that there remains a conservative climate in Catholic schools in which addressing such topics as the hyper-sexualization of girls on television is discouraged because the topic is seen as inappropriate. As such, these seven teachers taught their lessons behind closed doors.

Conversely, the other four Catholic teachers felt supported to infuse me-

dia education at their school sites. They characterized their principals as "progressive" and "advocates for social justice issues." In fact, one administrator required all teachers and students to implement the Dove media lesson. This was a lesson created by one of the teachers on the interplay between beauty and consumption. The students read Naomi Wolf's *Beauty Myth* and watched an advertisement for Dove soap where a "normal" looking girl is transformed by digital enhancements (Dove Evolution, 2006).

Another challenge facing the implementation of gender-specific media education is that it often falls short of providing a more critical feminist space where androcentric ideologies are explicitly interrogated. Although the teachers did attempt to define concepts like patriarchy in their classrooms, the lessons were more introductory in nature, limiting the depth of discussion they could facilitate among their female students. The teachers also expressed frustration in not being exposed to more media education in their teacher training coursework. This supports the need to continue developing a sound pedagogical framework for gender-specific media education and media literacy so as to ensure its inclusion in Catholic curricula and its overall success.

Imagining the Possibilities of Gender-specific Media Education in Catholic Schools

It is highly irresponsible in the face of saturation by the Internet and media culture to ignore the forms of oppression and injustice that impact young students in our classrooms. The digital age calls for cultivating media skills that allow our Catholic youth to analyze, discern, and create alternative media. As such, Catholic schools potentially become places where females can learn to transform society by dismantling dominant perspectives. In classrooms that embrace gender-specific media education, female students are provided an opportunity to analyze and critique dominant sexist narratives and feel confident in themselves and their individual values. Furthermore, their education potentially goes beyond critique as female Catholic students are provided tools to make their own media and make their own voices heard.

As evidenced by this study, gender-specific media education can have a positive impact on the schooling experience of female Catholic students according to teachers. Media education invites female Catholic students to interpret media representations critically, raise their level of academic inquiry, and confidently confront the conflict between the media's portrayal of society's standards and the values upheld by the Catholic Church.

Finally, it is important to note that gender-specific media education generated a significant degree of enthusiasm and student engagement that is all too rare in contemporary high schools. All the teachers confirmed that their female students requested more gender-specific media education lessons. One teacher concludes:

> These girls really really value their faith and they want to be able to talk about what they see on the Internet and the pressures they constantly feel. And I think part of being in a Catholic school is to have the opportunity to talk about injustices. You know in Catholic Social Teaching there is a tenet about human dignity. When these girls begin to learn about how women and girls are oppressed across the globe, they can start to tackle these issues from two different places, their minds and their souls.

This research study is exploratory in nature as there is very limited qualitative data on the implementation and impact of media education in K-12 Catholic schools. Future research could explore how gender-specific media education influences the academic experiences of male youth. In addition, research on how gender-specific media education plays out in elementary and middle school settings would give Catholic educators a more holistic understanding of the developmental requirements of media education for different age groups. Lastly, more in-depth qualitative work on the influence of gender-specific media education from the perspectives of students themselves would further illuminate the impact of media education in Catholic schools.

To conclude, the following recommendations may facilitate a more comprehensive implementation of gender-specific media education in Catholic schools. To begin, Catholic schools should recognize that although there are many troublesome images and ideas in popular culture, the effects of the mass media are complex and difficult to predict. Catholic leadership should therefore make a clear statement of purpose to promote media education as an essential part of basic education. This is far preferable to censorship as a means to address the media's influence on Catholic youth. As such, media education should be integrated into language arts, social studies, visual arts, health, and information technology curricula.

In addition, teacher training is essential to gender-specific media education. This could take the shape of professional development through seminars, workshops, and teacher training programs linked to archdioceses. Lastly, in-

creased funding to improve the technology capacity within Catholic schools is critical. If Catholic youth are expected to utilize the media as a platform for the development of Catholic perspectives, new technologies must be present in classrooms.

These recommendations begin to actualize a key educational objective that the Catholic Church has repeatedly supported. In the words of one teacher:

> We are losing the interest of our young people because we are ignoring the environment they are growing up in. I see this everyday, I see how what they see and hear is totally out of touch with the Catholic Church, and I think it is a travesty that our schools are not reacting. That to me is the injustice.

References

Alvermann, D.E., Moon, J.S., & Hagood, M.C. (1999). *Popular culture in the classroom: Teaching and researching critical media literacy.* Newark, DE and Chicago, IL: International Reading Association and the National Reading Conference.

American Psychological Association (2010). *Report of the APA task force on the sexualization of girls.* Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report-full.pdf

Beauben, R., Felver, J., & Innes, D. (1984). *The media mirror: A study guide on Christian values and television.* Washington DC: National Catholic Education Association:

Center for Media Literacy (1999). *What is Media Literacy?* Retrieved from http://www.medialit.org

Center for Media Literacy (2002). *Media literacy: A system for change.* Retrieved from http://www.medialit.org

Comber, B., & Nixon, H. (2005). Children reread and rewrite their local neighborhoods: Critical literacies and identity work. In J. Evans (Ed.), *Literacy moves on: Popular culture, new technologies, and critical literacy in the elementary classroom* (pp. 127-148). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Dove (Producer). (2006). *Evolution* [Motion Picture]. Available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loIFBr1moiE&feature=related

Durkin, S. J., & Paxton, S. J. (2002). Predictors of vulnerability to reduced body image satisfaction and psychological well-being in response to exposure to idealized female media images in adolescent girls. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 53, 995-1005.

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *The Handbook of research on teaching.* New York, NY: MacMillan.

Foehr, U. (2006). *Media multi-tasking among American youth.* Washington, DC: The Henry J.

Kaiser Family Foundation Report.

Fredrickson, B. L., Roberts,T., Noll, S. M., Quinn, D. M., & Twenge, J.M. (1998). That swimsuit becomes you: Sex differences in self-objectification, restrained eating, and math performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75, 269-284.

Gapinski, K. D., Brownell, K. D., & LaFrance, M. (2003). Body objectification and "fat talk:" Effects on emotion, motivation, and cognitive performance. *Sex Roles*, 48, 377-388.

Goodman, S. (2003). *Teaching youth media: A critical guide to literacy, video production, and social change.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Hammer, R., & Kellner, D. (Eds.) (2009). *Media/cultural studies: Critical approaches.* New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Haraway, D. (1998). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575-599.

Haraway, D. (2004). Situated knowledge. In Harding, S. (Ed.), *Feminist standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Harding, S. (Ed.). (2004). *Feminist standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Harding, S. (1987). *Feminism and methodology: Social science issues.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Harding, S. (1991). *Whose science/whose knowledge? Thinking from women's lives.* Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press

Hill-Collins, P. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment.* New York, NY & London, England: Routledge.

Hobbs, R., & Frost, R. (2003). Measuring the acquisition of media-literacy skills. *Reading Research Quarterly.* 38(3). 330-355.

Hull. G. (2003). Youth culture and digital media: New literacies for new times. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 38(2), 229-233.

Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2007). Critical media literacy, democracy, and the reconstruction of education. In D. Macedo & S.R. Steinberg (Eds.), *Media literacy: A reader* (pp. 3-23). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Lenhart, A., Madden, M., MacGill, A.R., & Smith, A. (2007). *Teens and social media.* Pew Internet and American Life Project.

Liebau, C. P. (2007). *Prude: How the sex obsessed culture damages girls.* Boston, MA: Center Street Publishing.

Livingstone, S., & Bovill, M. (2001). *Children and their changing media environment: A European comparative study.* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum Press.

Luke, C. (1994). Feminist pedagogy and critical media literacy. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 18(2), 30-47.

Luke, C. (1997). Media literacy and cultural studies. In S. Muspratt, A. Luke, & P. Freebody (Eds.), *Constructing critical literacies: Teaching & learning textual practice* (pp. 19–49). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.

Luke, C. (2004). Feminist pedagogy and critical media literacy. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 18(2), 30-47.

Macedo, D., & Steinberg, S.R. (Eds.). (2007). *Media literacy: A reader.* New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. (2010). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Masterman, Len. (1998). Forward: The media education revolution. In A. Hart (Ed.), *Teaching the media: International perspectives,* (p. xi). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

McLaren, P., Hammer, R., Sholle, D., & Reilly, S. S. (Ed.). (1995). *Rethinking Media Literacy: A Critical Pedagogy of Representation* (Vols. 4). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Morrell, E. (2004). *Becoming critical researchers: Literacy and empowerment for urban youth*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Morrell, E. (2008). *Critical literacy and urban youth: Pedagogies of access, dissent, and liberation*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Order of the Second Vatican Council (1971). *Communio et Progressio: The contribution of Catholics to social communication*.

Pope Benedict XVI. (2007, May 20). Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI for the 41st World Communications Day. "Children and the Media: A Challenge for Education."

Reel Girls. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.reelgrrls.org/about/overview

Roberts, D.F., Foehr, U., & Rideout, M. (2005). *Generation M: Media in the lives of 8-18 year-olds*. Washington, DC: The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

Rushkoff, D. (2006). *ScreenAgers: Lesson in chaos from digital kids*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Schropp M. L. (Ed.). (1982). *The media mirror: A study guide on Christian values and television-teacher's guide*. Washington, DC: U.S. Catholic Conference.

Silverblatt, A., & E. Eliceiri. (1997). *Dictionary of Media Literacy*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Thoman, E. (2003). Media literacy: A guided tour of the best resources for teaching. *The Clearing House*, 76(6), 278-283.

TVbyGirls. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.tvbygirls.tv/the_site/home.htm

Yvette V. Lapayese, Ph.D. is an associate professor in the School of Education at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Her areas of specialization include critical media literacy in urban settings, feminist theories and methodologies in education, and the intersections of race, class, and gender in the scholarship of teaching and learning. She has published several articles in these areas and an upcoming book on (re)imagining K-12 education through a feminist lens. Correspondence for this article should be sent to Dr. Yvette V. Lapayese at yvette.lapayese@lmu.edu.