

Missrepresentation: Are You a Part of it?

By Amy Chang.

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"In one week American teenagers spend 31 hours watching TV, 17 hours listening to music, 3 hours watching movies, 4 hours reading magazines, 10 hours online. That's 10 hours and 45 minutes of media consumption a day." - *Miss Representation*

The media is beyond powerful. It shapes our perceptions of what is normal, what is acceptable and what should be sought after. What you see and hear influences you, whether you are aware of how powerful of an impact the media has or not.

The documentary [Miss Representation](#) discusses how females are portrayed in the media, and the negative consequences that this misrepresentation has on our society. Television shows, reality TV, movies, videogames ... there is a pervasive message that tells the world that the value in a woman is in her looks, her sexuality, her body and even her submission to men. One may think that watching a television show like "Keeping Up With the Kardashians" is harmless, but for many, it's not -- it shapes our perceptions.

I know, because a television show helped shaped mine. In my late teens and early twenties, there were only a few things that my life revolved around: boys, stilettos, clubbing, and "Sex and the City."

I grew up on "Sex in the City." I admired the women and could identify to some degree with each one of the main characters. I remember watching Samantha -- a successful, independent woman who had no emotional attachment to men -- and seeing her use men as playthings. I remember thinking to myself, "Wow, what a powerful woman. She wears designer clothes, has a successful business and treats men like toys. She never gets hurt and always seems to have it together." As a girl who grew up so desperately wanting to feel loved and accepted by a male figure, to me, having the freedom to not feel emotionally attached or disappointed by a man seemed like a strength. In a sense, Samantha's "empowerment" became an inspiration for me, and I saw her character as a role model.

This type of role model may work for some, but for a lost, vulnerable and insecure twenty-year-old ... not so much. I spent a good part of my twenties thinking empowerment came from looking perfect, being sexually attractive and always having the best outfit. But after multiple experiences with low self-esteem, attracting the wrong guys and never feeling good or pretty enough, I realized that my perception was all wrong. I'm not blaming Samantha's character as the cause of this. But if I was able to know what I know now, and tell my younger, confused self a message, I'd tell her this:

Your empowerment and self-worth is not created by fancy clothes, a perfect body or obsessing over physical beauty. It doesn't come from tearing other females down. It doesn't come from men. Your empowerment comes from your accomplishments, your

contributions, your integrity, your values and how you love and care for others. Because the other stuff doesn't last. It can feel good for a moment, and sometimes a long moment, but eventually, it all fades. And you're left with nothing physical or superficial -- only with what you created within.

I believe that to change the way that the media influences society is to change the way we see, and therefore absorb, media. We need to have those important discussions -- with our children, our family, our peers and our friends -- and ask the question, "Why?" more. We need to learn to make it regular practice to dig deeper into why we believe in the things we do, and not take things at their face value.

We need to choose our role models carefully. We need to seek positive role models, period. When you ask a handful of adolescent girls who they aspire to be like, it's frightening how many will say "Kim Kardashian" or "Miley Cyrus." The media will continue to dish out cheap, sensationalized gossip on such celebrities. The solution isn't to ban the media, but to better equip youths (and even adults) with media literacy and a more informed lens on how they view it.

So how do we create change? As one person, what can you do?

I truly do believe in the quote, "Be the change you wish to see in the world."

Don't underestimate your power to influence. You exert influence every single day -- over your family, your friends, your peers, even perfect strangers. Your behavior and the image you put out to the world contributes to what the "norm" is. Have the courage to question the norms that the media and even all your friends are subscribing to. Ask yourself, is this way of thinking, this behavior serving me and my real, authentic empowerment? You can choose to accept the status-quo or you can use your values as your compass. That's a choice -- and a pretty powerful choice if you ask me.

Amy Chan is a marketing executive and a relationship columnist for Vancouver's 24 Hours Newspaper. In her spare time, when she's not making mix tapes or up to general do-gooding, she's an avid blogger (with the moniker AmyFabulous), food enthusiast and world traveler. To read her blogs, visit www.amyfabulous.com.