

# FEMINIST VISIONS

## “DO YOU YOUTUBE?” USING ONLINE VIDEO IN WOMEN’S STUDIES COURSES

by Deb Hoskins

The filmmaker is still in high school. Her project includes her own update of the “doll test” that sociologists Kenneth B. and Mamie Phipps Clark conducted in the 1950s, the study that taught the nine white men of the Supreme Court that separate was not equal and thus contributed to the landmark school desegregation decision of 1954: *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. The filmmaker, Kiri Davis, displays two dolls — one black, one white — on a table. She asks one little black kid after another a series of questions: “Which doll is nice?” “Which is bad?” “Which is prettier?” “Which would you most like to play with?” Her last question is always, “Which doll looks most like you?”

Some of these tiny, sparkling, beautiful little kids have chosen the white doll as better all the way through, and then they smack into that last question. They pick the black doll, but many of them hesitate; they sag, their bright smiles fade, they collapse into their small selves as they choose. The last little girl clearly wants to choose the white doll, but finally she pushes the black doll slowly across the table to the interviewer. “Fifteen out of the twenty-one children preferred the white doll,” the filmmaker tells you matter-of-factly, but she holds that final image just long enough to break your heart.

The segment I’ve just described is in an award-winning short film called “A Girl Like Me” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17fEy0q6yqc>). It appears between segments that feature young African American women talk-

ing about the stereotypes they face and the impact these ideas have on them. I can’t compete for emotional impact with a skilled filmmaker, not even one who is seventeen, no matter how eloquent I am. This video works very well to get introductory-level classes talking about beauty images in ways students may not consider on their own, and without turning the few students of color in the class into token spokespersons for their race. My first question when the film ends is, Are we a color-blind society now? I pair this



video with a series from the Dove Self-Esteem Fund that exposes the media’s construction of beauty ideals (<http://www.dove.us/#/features/videos/default.aspx?cp-documentid=7049579>). But I start with “A Girl Like Me.” All my students need to understand that feminine beauty ideals are racialized for both white women and women of color and that the processes of racialization are not safely in the past. Showing these films together also helps me demonstrate that resistance to those ideals is alive and well.

It is cliché by now to note that mainstream popular culture has enveloped our traditional-aged students in a multimedia extravaganza that may be shortening their attention spans.

That’s not the reason to use short film. The immediacy of short films is what matters. They can provide a succinct emotional impact or a spate of humor, along with a timely new perspective on an issue, right when you need it. They open new ways to think about teaching and learning. I use them to expand the role that both passion and humor play in *critical thinking*, so that I am no longer the only reliable conduit of such emotions in the classroom. Short films make me just one of many and less of an anachronism (“Well, maybe that was a problem when *you* were young...”).

According to the literature on learning, emotion helps learning “stick.” I will use a short film in class if, and only if, it offers a new perspective or reflects critical thinking that challenges a dominant paradigm. I don’t usually use short film, at least in class, to convey information or to provide evidence of an analysis — although of course, you could. See, for example, “A History of International Women’s Day” (<http://www.internationalwomens-day.com/video/video.asp>).

I use videos to analyze very contemporary issues. Faith in America and the National Black Justice Coalition produced a short film in 2007 celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the *Loving* decision, declaring it unconstitutional for states to prohibit interracial marriages, that connected the logic behind that decision to logical support for same-sex marriages (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WhV000HBELA>). Musi-

cians took seriously the United Nations Millennium Summit pledge to end extreme poverty in 2015, signed by the United States (<http://www.youtube.com/user/inmyname>), and will.i.am's video explains to my students that lasting change depends on their collective involvement to move politicians to keep their promises ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLjUlptB6ZM&feature=channel\\_page](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLjUlptB6ZM&feature=channel_page)). What better context for teaching policy analysis and development?

For International Women's Day, I found Alice Walker's "Not with a bang. But with a whimper" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGe-UsFcK-NI>) and showed it in Intro to Women's Studies as a prelude to a discussion on the gender gap in American politics. A CBS "Early Show" discussion on race and gender in politics during the 2008 presidential campaign (<http://video.aol.com/video-detail/the-early-show-looking-at-race-and-gender-in-politics/4137955712>) sparked an interesting discussion in an upper-level course. The point is, the issues change rapidly, and so can you.

I also use videos to convey how identities intersect. Poetry is making a glorious comeback as an activist medium that serves this purpose. A 1960s performance by the Sisterhood of the American Revolution corrects stereotypical views of both Second Wave feminist and black nationalist movements (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9stfTcGHzhI>). Contemporary poets like Staceyann Chin, one of my favorites, question how much identity matters in "Feminist or Womanist" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQOmeybFVV8>). Dee Mathews' analysis of her role as a mother of boys rips through simplistic notions that feminist equality is primarily about building one's own career in "Mother of

Earth" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qDSSJZ8Vpg>). Andrea Gibson analyzes the importance of the arts and her role as an artist to social change at the National Women's Music Festival in 2008 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKlqzdKEUrU>). How could these texts be better than as performed by their authors?

If you don't have access to classroom technology, you can still use online video. Just paste the URLs into your syllabus along with your assigned readings, or use them as a way to "hybridize" your course by creating another learning environment online within your institution's course software (D2L, Blackboard, Moodle). The subjects you can find are endless. If you can think of the topic, someone has made a video on it. Trust me. You may not want to watch it, but somebody's made one.

Given that reality, how can you find good stuff without slogging through vicious, misogynist, homophobic garbage? Locating a short film for a course is easiest if you have a very clear idea of what you need; just Google using the video option and a very specific phrase. You can also Google a general topic with the video option, of course, but that yields a very mixed bag if you're just searching on a broad term misogynists love, like "feminism." At the main YouTube site, you'll find both "Channels" and "Community" tabs that make searching somewhat easier within its website. You can also enter a general search term at YouTube's homepage; "feminism" right now returns the "men on the street" feminism survey first (a trailer for the film "I Was a Teenage Feminist") (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pdbhzFUxXI>), but beyond that, plenty of misogyny. Instead, try clicking the Community tab, then narrowing your options from the list on the left (e.g., "Channels," or

"Community" followed by "Categories," then "News & Politics"). Many feminist and other social justice organizations have Channels on YouTube (Planned Parenthood at <http://www.youtube.com/user/plannedparent-hood>; the Planned Parenthood Action Fund at <http://www.youtube.com/user/PPVotes>; NOW at <http://www.youtube.com/user/NOWvideos>; and the Feminist Majority Foundation at <http://www.youtube.com/user/feministmajority> — but maybe you need CripJustice's sometimes-explicit deconstructions of disability, beauty, and sexuality at <http://www.youtube.com/user/CripJustice>). To find an organization, first enter its name and click on "Search," then select "Channels" from the three options at the top of the results list to narrow the results. If you find a group you like, YouTube lets you subscribe to its feed.

Short video is everywhere on the Internet, though. iTunes increasingly includes video podcasts, many free, through its iTunes Store; the iTunes "U" section is developing into a location to monitor. Nearly all the international and U.S. broadcast and cable news programs post video on their websites.

One good film may lead you to others. All of the films in Dove's "real beauty" campaign, for example, might be useful in various contexts. Some films appear in several locations on the Web. And the Dove videos are not only on Dove's website (in two locations), but also on YouTube. I choose the option that allows me to show the video full-screen with the best quality, and I always test how a video looks on the big screen in my classroom before I use it in class. Particularly if passion is important to your instructional goals, remember to warn students in advance about the language these films sometimes use.

Once I have found the video I want, I copy and paste the URL into a document that I can upload into online storage (if your institution has this option), save to a jump drive, or list as a link on my course website. I like having more than one way to get to my link, so I typically do all three. If I don't want students to view these videos before I show them in class, I use my institution's course management software to time when the link appears for students. (As course administrator, I can always see everything. Oh, the power!) For the document, I prefer to embed the link into my syllabus for the date when I intend to use it, but then format it as hidden text. Most students don't know about this feature, although most word-processing programs have

it. In class, I pull up the syllabus and click the show/hide icon (I use Microsoft Word — in Word 2007, the icon is on the Home tab, in the Paragraph section) to reveal the hidden text. Remember disappearing ink when you were a kid? Same thing — fabulous! Once I have my video open on the computer screen, I minimize or close the syllabus and then (and only then!) choose the computer as the source for the classroom projector. Students never see my hidden-text links. Another option might be bookmarks in your Web browser, especially if you use Firefox's add-in that synchronizes bookmarks across all the computers you use.

Students can explore the use of short film for class presentations themselves, and many are doing so already.

Perhaps you'd like to explore the use of short film as the product your students create to demonstrate what they have learned, as in the fabulous film (ok, with one unfortunate typo) "The Future of Feminism," submitted as a final project for a women's studies course (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9ryGeJopBA&feature=PlayList&p=634918C34E571F45&index=23>). Hope she got an A.

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*Miriam Greenwald*