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BY KRISTA HAWKINS

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AS A MOTHER OF TWO GIRLS, I am passionate about empowering and protecting children. I immediately knew what I wanted to explore in my film project for Dr. Rhonda Hammer's course on "Critical Media Literacy," because I had been noticing that my daughters were getting some negative messages about what it means to be female, messages that were contrary to what I have tried to teach and show them. I have always monitored their viewing of television programs, but stereotypical ideas about femininity were nonetheless creeping into their consciousness. Even though I began to watch some programs with them so that we could discuss the often-subtle negative messages, I didn't feel I was doing an adequate job of explaining this complex issue.

Directing and co-producing Commodifying Lolita: The Hypersexualization of Tweens in America gave my group the opportunity to combine media literacy discourse, feminist theory, personal artistic expression, and activism. I also learned how to use media as a catalyst for discussion, education, and social change. Examining the hypersexualization of "tweens" (girls

between the ages of 8 and 12), our film reveals a connection between the hypersexualization of young girls and the prevalence of pedophilia in the U.S. Why, our film asks, does a society that claims to oppose pedophilia and child pornography market images that promote the sexual exploitation of young girls?

Making the film was empowering to the members of my group but making it available to others was important to us and to Dr. Hammer. We were guest lecturers in her graduate film course, "Film and Society: The Politics of Representation," and for her undergraduate/graduate course, "Critical Media Literacy and the Politics of Gender: Theory and Production." To showcase our documentary and the artistic work of other students, I cocurated an exhibit, "Art as Social and Political Commentary," at UCLA in 2007. It addressed the ideological nature of stereotyping and the politics of representation with regard to gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality. I am also pleased to report that our documentary was selected for use in a cultural studies course at Otis College of Art and Design.

With Dr. Hammer's encouragement, I was

also able to complete my honors senior thesis, "Selling Sexy as 'Cool': HIV/AIDS and the Voice of African American Girls." An exploration in using art and media literacy as social, educational, and retention tools in the creation of HIV/AIDS prevention materials, this 12-week project entailed working with a small group of inner-city girls.

As I now pursue graduate study, I am still searching for new ways to incorporate media literacy and alternative media texts into my artistic, social, and political activism. Equally important, my daughters (aged 11 and 14) have also gained; they are more empowered as media viewers and are creating and producing their own alternative media texts.

In 2007, Krista L. Hawkins graduated magna cum laude from UCLA with a B.A. in Women's Studies: Art and Media and received the iArts Undergraduate Award. She is pursuing a master's degree in the Marriage and Family Therapy/Clinical Art Therapy Program at Loyola Marymount University. She is also the co-director of self-esteem workshops for teens and utilizes critical media literacy in the curriculum.