

STUDY GUIDE FOR “DR. VAJAYJAY'S! PRIVATIZE THOSE PRIVATES!” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9kCw0Lmaa0>

INTRODUCTION

This Study Guide will help educators use Dr. Vajayjay’s “Privatize those Privates” to enhance critical thinking and awareness about female genital cosmetic surgery (FGCS) and the commodification of female sexuality. The video and study guide can be used in classrooms and brown bag lunch-type meetings at the high school, community college, college, and university levels, and in a variety of community settings.

“Privatize those Privates” uses parody to show how some medical professionals create markets for their services by making it appear that they are “giving women what they want.” The aim is to provoke viewers to consider how “what women want” is in fact deeply embedded in economic, corporate, political, medical, and other power structures that stand to benefit from creating insecurities in women about their appearance and sexual attractiveness.

This Study Guide consists of five sections which can be used in any order and adapted to any size group. Each section has one activity and several questions to stimulate discussion after the activity. We would love your feedback about this Study Guide: info@newviewcampaign.org.

I. WHAT WOMEN WANT

Activity

The woman character in “Privatize Those Privates” (let’s call her Jen) barely speaks throughout the video. Now is your chance to hear what Jen has to say! Gather in a small group and decide who will role-play Jen. Put Jen in the “hotseat” and take turns asking her questions about how she feels about FGCS, whether she would choose to have the surgery and why or why not, and what she might have said if she had a chance to speak in the video. Take turns being in the hotseat and playing Jen.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did the producers of the video choose to give Jen a largely silent role? What might her silence signify?
2. When you had Jen “speak” what dilemmas did she express about her decisions to embrace or reject FGCS?
3. What were the sentiments in the group about the role of women consumers in the market for FGCS?
4. Assuming that one of Jen’s priorities is to feel as sexually confident and attractive as possible, explain why she may not feel this way and the role that FCGS may play in this process.

II. PROMOTING GENITAL DIVERSITY

Activity

In “Privatize Those Privates” Dr. Vajayjay is telling women that there is something ‘wrong’ with their normal genitalia and he shows how to market discontent to sell a service that supposedly “gives women what they want.” Let’s look at the opposite message. In small groups, design a campaign to celebrate genital diversity. Identify sites where you could conduct this campaign. Who could you target? What key messages would be important? What slogans would you use?

Discussion Questions

1. How does the marketing of FGCS procedures erase genital diversity?
2. What are some consequences of the FGCS marketing approach for both women and their sexual partners?
2. What images have you seen of women’s genitals? Where were they from? Do these representations affect people’s views about ‘normal’ genitalia?

III. TOUGH DECISIONS

Activity

Shiela is a woman in her 20s considering one of the FGCS procedures. Although Shiela may feel it’s a very personal and private decision, let’s think about all the people and sources of information that may influence her. Draw a stick figure in the middle of a large piece of paper (or on a chalkboard) representing Shiela. Brainstorm all the different sources of messages Shiela has received about her genitals and the FGCS procedure and portray them in a large circle around Shiela (e.g., “parents/family... religion... music/tv/videos... advertisements... life experiences...”). Keep the discussion going until you have many different kinds of input. Then describe one main recommendation coming from each of those voices.

Discussion Questions

1. Were there any surprises in generating the list of people and sources that contribute input about a woman’s genitals?
2. Would the messages be different for women of color? Married women? Poor women? Women a hundred years ago?

IV. EXAMINING SURGEONS' WEBSITES

Activity

Find some of the FGCS websites. There are dozens like <http://www.labiaplastycenters.com>. Use your search engine creatively or go to the websites listed on <http://www.labiaplastysurgeon.com>. Find examples of each technique raised by Dr. Vajayjay in "Privatize Those Privates": plant the seed of discontent, make it science, make it pink, make it feminist.

Discussion Questions

1. Which persuasion technique described by Dr. Vajayjay was the easiest to find examples of? Which was the hardest?
2. How did using Dr. Vajayjay's insider information change your experience of looking at the websites ?

V. IMAGINING THE FUTURE

Activity

Commodification refers to the process by which "value" is added to something such that it can be sold for profit. For example, Dr. Vajayjay uses the techniques of "Cosmetogynecology" to make women's genitals "better" such that they can be sold back to them as an "improved" product that supposedly boosts their sexual confidence and pleasure. He also uses the glamorous name "Cosmetogynecology" to make doctors feel they are involved in an exciting new area.

In small groups, choose a body part that has not yet been commodified, and dream up a technology or service that could be used to "improve" it in some way. Now, imagine that you are a design team who has been hired to market this new technology or service. Drawing on the techniques offered by Dr. Vajayjay, develop a marketing strategy to do so. Remember, as Dr Vajayjay says, to be creative!

Discussion Questions

1. What was it like trying to think of a body part that has not yet been commodified?
2. How might commodification influence people's relationships with their bodies?
3. What are some ethical dilemmas that arise when marketing and medicine are combined?

CONCLUSION

The New View Campaign (newviewcampaign.org) is a grassroots project that has been challenging the medicalization of sexuality since 2000. We have focused on FGCS since 2008 with many different activities: conferences, publications, journalist interviews, online petitions, gallery exhibits, street demonstrations, and, most recently, our first video, “**DR. VAJAYJAY’S! PRIVATIZE THOSE PRIVATES!**” Our work shows what a determined intergenerational group of feminist activists can accomplish. And have fun doing it.

For further information, consult:

- <http://newviewcampaign.org/fgcs.asp> Our 2008 events and resources.
- <http://newviewcampaign.org/vulvagraphics.asp> Vulvagraphics: Our 2009 events and resources
- <http://newviewcampaign.org/conference3.asp> “Framing the Vulva” - our 2010 event (a conference). You can see the presentations and read the final report.
- <http://newviewcampaign.org/vulvanomics.asp> Vulvanomics: our 2011 events, including a petition, flash activism, up to date statistics and other resources, and a link to our video.
- Here are two publications to read:
 - Braun, Virginia (2010) Female Genital Cosmetic Surgery: A critical review of current knowledge and contemporary debates. *Journal of Women’s Health*, 19: 1393-1407.
 - Braun, Virginia and Tiefer, Leonore (2010) The ‘designer vagina’ and the pathologisation of female genital diversity: Interventions for change. *Radical Psychology*, vol 8 #1.
<file:///Users/leonoretiefer/Desktop/Tiefer,%20‘Designer%20Vagina’%202010.webarchive>

Join our listserv <http://newviewcampaign.org/listserv.asp> and stay in touch!

This study guide has been prepared by New View Campaign members

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