



Cover Girl Culture film designed to empower girls

By Valerie Hill, Record staff

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KITCHENER — It could not have been easy, trading a job where the average pay was \$2,000 per day, to become an advocate for girls' self-esteem but Nicole Clark has never regretted her decision.

The former Elite International model will be in Kitchener Nov. 23 and 24 presenting her film *Cover Girl Culture: Awakening the Media Generation* at the Zonta Club of Kitchener Waterloo Film Festival. In a candid phone interview from her California home, the former model speaks passionately about what media images are doing to girls' sense of themselves.

"When they look at a (fashion) photo, all they can see is something they can compare themselves to," said Clark who is also increasingly alarmed at the sexualization of girls in the media.

"I want to open the eyes of girls' parents and educators, the impact the media is having on girls," she said. "Things have gotten out of balance."

Clark's unusual journey to advocacy came as the result of a modeling career she never wanted in the first place. The admittedly shy, Sarnia-born Clark had been raised to believe that girls should be valued and judged by the person they are, not looks.

As a first year kinesiology student at the University of Guelph, a friend convinced her to enter a modeling contest held at the university which she did after a lot of pressure from her friend. She was subsequently shocked to win though she turned down the offered modeling contract. A second opportunity presented itself during a modeling competition in London, Ont. where first prize was \$500 and Clark needed the money.

"I was strong, an athlete and modeling didn't appeal to me," she recalled.



Nicole Clark. Filmmaker and former model Nicole Clark will be in town on Nov. 23 and 24 when she is presenting her film *Cover Girl Culture: Awakening the Media Generation* at the Zonta Club of Kitchener Waterloo Film Festival. Christopher David Ward

Yet the modeling world was determined to capture the young woman and after being pursued by agents who weren't taking no for an answer, she gave in, leaving university to pursue modeling though it never felt right to her. She was constantly upset by how young women were being portrayed in the media, by the superficial and backstabbing world that surrounded her. At one point, she was told not to talk during shoots because she came across as too intelligent and therefore intimidating.

"You start to wonder, is that how I want to be valued?" she asked herself. "So I left."

At that time Clark was living in Miami where she had met her husband-to-be. The couple now lives in California where Clark expends her energy trying to reach girls through public speaking, workshops and her film which exposes the dark underbelly of advertising through candid interviews with agents, designers, fashion magazine editors, models and advertisers.

She is constantly upset with how females are depicted in ads like the Jimmy Choo shoe ad with a man and a woman in the desert. The woman appears dead, lying in the open trunk of the man's car while he is busy digging a burial hole. Clark offers solutions to stopping such offensive ads: don't buy the product.

She's hoping to change the way girls think when they see such ads. "I want to help them become critical thinkers," she said.

Clark's ideas seem to have an impact because when girls are shown the film, or go through Clark's companion workshop *Seeing Through the Media Matrix*, she said they react strongly.

"They get quite angry, how they've been manipulated and they ask 'what can I do?' "

Though her work, Clark also tries to reach parents, to tell them not to focus so much on their daughters' appearance. And she gets very annoyed with reality shows about beauty pageants for children. "That's a form of child abuse," she said, noting people like to watch the show so they feel better about their own parenting.

"It's got to stop."

In keeping with the topic of the status of women, the Zonta Film Festival will also feature two other films: *Who Cares About Her* and *Child Marriages*, films that look into the challenges faced by adolescent girls in East Africa.

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Zonta Club of Kitchener Waterloo Film Festival

Princess Twin Theatre, 46 King St. N., Waterloo

Nov. 23 *Cover Girl Culture: Awakening the Media Generation*

Nov. 24 *Who Cares About Her* and *Child Marriages*

6 p.m. screenings \$10 followed by a discussion with the director

8 p.m. screenings \$20, includes after party

Tickets 519-746-1039 or www.kwzontafilmmfestival.com

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