

Grade 7

Gender, Body Image & Social Influences



Learner Outcomes

W-7.12 Identify the effects of social influences on sexuality and gender roles and equity; e.g., media, culture

W-7.4 Analyze the message and approaches used by the media to promote certain body images and lifestyle choices

This lesson addresses all of the specific outcomes listed above. Instruction in human sexuality (***bolded and italicized*** outcomes) requires schools to provide notice to parents about the learning outcomes, topics and resources.

How To Use

This lesson plan contains several activities to achieve the learner outcomes above. You may choose to do some or all of the activities, based on the needs of your students and the time available. Some of the activities build on the ones that come before them, but all can be used individually.

For a quick lesson, combine activities A, B, F, and G.

Classroom Activities & Timing

- A. Ground Rules (5-10 minutes)
- B. Me vs. TV (15-20 minutes)
- C. Exploring Media Influence Using Advertisements (20-45 minutes)
- D. Gender Roles, Equity and Stereotyping (15-20 minutes)
- E. Body Image Introduction (5-10 minutes)
- F. Body Image and Media (30-45 minutes)
- G. Question Box (5-10 minutes)

Required Materials

HANDOUT: Sex in Advertising

HANDOUT: Me vs. TV

HANDOUTS: Gender Stereotypes Scenarios 1-6

Selection of sexualized advertisements from magazines or printed from online sources

Magazines for cutting, scissors and glue, newsprint or poster paper, markers, masking tape

Background Information for Teachers

Activity C Exploring Media Influences Using Advertisements

requires extra time to find print or digital ads before class. The idea is to find highly sexualized ads. This approach is used by many companies to sell: clothing, cosmetics, cars, footwear, jeans, etc. If there is a recent ad or current event that has caused some controversy, it may also be helpful to include this as an example.

Our society is becoming increasingly complex, and students are presented with messages about sexuality from many sources. It is important to help students identify and decipher these messages, determine which ones to listen to, and learn how to filter out the negative messages.

Social influences on gender roles and equity need to be examined to ensure students develop skills to balance the messages received against the values they hold.

Body image and self-esteem are closely related. Body image has two components: the mental picture you have of your body and how you feel about how your body looks. A healthy body image means accepting how you look and not trying to change your body to fit an external ideal. A healthy body image contributes to feeling capable, confident and respecting yourself, all parts of a healthy self-esteem. Increasing student awareness of the influence various sources can have on body image and behaviour helps students to cope with the pressures society imposes, and be kinder to others.

Inclusive Language

Language is complex, evolving and powerful. In these lessons, [inclusive language](#) is used to include all students, including those with diverse gender identities, gender expressions and sexual orientations. This includes the use of ‘they’ as a singular gender-neutral pronoun.

A person’s sex can be assigned at birth as male or female. Some people are intersex (the reproductive, sexual or genetic biology of a person is unclear, not exclusively male or female or otherwise does not fit within traditional definitions of male or female). Assigned sex is independent of gender.

Gender identity is a person’s internal sense of identity as girl/woman, boy/man, fluid among genders or no gender (regardless of what sex they were assigned at birth).

For many people, their gender is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth (cisgender). For others, their gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. They may use terms like transgender, trans, non-binary, gender fluid, gender queer, agender or others, to describe their gender identity. The umbrella term 'trans' is primarily used here, to describe people whose gender identity and sex assigned at birth differ. While this umbrella term does not fit everyone, the intention is to be inclusive as possible.

Advertising Methods

For Activity C, you may wish to bring up some of these common advertising strategies.

- **Bandwagon:** everyone is doing it/buying it/using it.
- **Testimonial:** a famous person claims to use the product or recommends it.
- **Association:** a product is associated with certain people, activities, or places. The message implies an association with wealth, attractiveness, enjoyment, adventure, etc to evoke an emotional response in the target audience.
- **Omission:** certain facts about the product are left out.
- **Repetition:** saying a message over and over.
- **Scale:** making a product bigger or smaller than it actually is.
- **Name-calling:** making the product seem better by criticizing the competition.
- **Weasel:** a promise implied by using words like 'fights', 'helps', 'usually', 'chances are' and 'virtually'.
- **Promotions:** encouraging purchase by using coupons, games with prizes, or gifts with purchase.
- **Magic ingredients:** the suggestion that some special discovery or ingredient makes the product exceptionally effective or better than the competitor's product.
- **Avant garde:** the suggestion that using this product makes the consumer a leader or ahead of the times.
- **Compliments:** the ad compliments the customer, e.g. cosmetic ads that say 'Because you're worth it!'
- **Plain folk:** appeals to the desire to fit in, by showing that regular people use the product.
- **Facts and statistics:** using numbers, real examples and statistics to make claims about the products e.g. 'Three out of four dentists agree'.

A. Ground Rules

Ensure [ground rules](#) are established before beginning this lesson. For classes that have already established ground rules, quickly reviewing them can help ensure a successful lesson.

B. Me vs. TV

Students are introduced to the idea of media literacy and begin to identify the messages sent by the media they consume.

1. Introduce the idea of media literacy by asking the following questions. Solicit answers from the class and share any elements they do not come up with from the answers below.

How can we define 'media'?

Media is a term for the industrial forms of mass communication. This includes TV, movies, magazines, internet etc.

What is media literacy?

Media literacy is the ability to use critical thinking skills to analyze media messages- from music videos and internet environments to product placement in movies and virtual displays on NHL hockey boards. It's the instinct to question what lies behind media productions— the motives, the money, the values and the ownership— and to be aware of how these factors influence content.

What are the different media industries that try to reach kids and teens?

Write down the different industries identified by the students. Examples may include:

- Social Media e.g. TikTok
 - Advertising
 - TV/Streaming services/YouTube
 - Movie
 - Music
 - News
 - Internet
 - Magazines
2. Explain that you are going to consider some of the messages that TV shows send them.
 3. Distribute the **Me vs. TV** handout for students to complete. You may wish to let them discuss their answers in small groups as they write.

Encourage them to view 'TV' as including Netflix, YouTube videos, movies etc. as well as traditional TV content.

4. Debrief by having a class discussion with the following questions:
 - What were some of the major differences between your lives and the lives portrayed on TV? Similarities?
 - Do the messages about sexuality sent by TV match your values? Why or why not?
 - If you could create a show that would reflect your life, what would it look like?

C. Exploring Media Influence Using Advertisements

Students increase awareness of the sexual messages presented in advertising and identify the effects of media influence on sexuality.

For more media and Internet education resources including lesson plans and activities visit [Media Smarts](#)

1. Before class, collect a selection of highly sexualized advertisements from print (e.g. magazines) or online sources. Try to have about one per student. If you can, try to find ads that are directed at teens, not just adults.
2. If you did not complete the Me vs. TV activity, introduce the concepts of media and media literacy (see Activity B above).
3. Ask the students to name any sources of information about sexuality or sexual activity in their lives. Answers may include:
 - Parents, other family members
 - Teachers
 - TV/movies
 - Internet, social media
 - Friends
 - Advertising
 - Books, magazines, comics
4. Explain that the class is going to examine the advertising industry and study the messages about sexuality that this industry sends to kids and teens.
5. Divide the class into groups of 3-5 students.
6. Distribute the handout **Sex in Advertising** to each group.
7. Provide the class with the selection of advertisements and have each group choose one advertisement to analyze. These could be print or online ads.

It is also valuable to discuss the inclusion or exclusion of diverse groups in media communications. Ask the students to consider who is shown, and who is not shown, in media messages.

8. Give groups time to analyze their advertisement based on the handout.
9. Ask each group to present their advertisement analysis to the class.
10. Debrief this activity using the following questions:
 - In the ads we examined, what messages about sexuality are being sent by the advertising industry?
 - Are these messages positive or negative?
 - Do the ads we looked at send messages that reflect your values?
 - If these messages about sexuality are contrary to our values, what choices do we have?
 - Stop buying the products.
 - Encourage the producers to change the message. Discuss various ways to do so such as writing letters, speaking to people in industry, not clicking links, etc.

D. Gender Roles and Stereotyping

Students examine the concepts of gender, gender roles and stereotypes and begin to consider their impact.

1. Ask the class to answer the following questions:

What is gender? Gender identity? Gender Expression?

- Gender as an overarching concept refers to the social norms and expressions associated with different gender identities. This includes neutral and positive attributes and more negative stereotypes about what it means to be a boy/man or girl/woman.
- Gender identity or an individual's gender is a person's internal, deeply held sense of their identity as a girl/woman, boy/man, both, neither, or fluid between.
- A person's gender identity has many influences including their relationship to their body, the social messaging they've grown up with, and their individual experiences.
- Gender expression refers to how someone outwardly expresses their internal sense of gender. It can include how a person looks, dresses, speaks and much more. It also includes the name and pronouns a person uses.

What is a stereotype?

- A stereotype is a belief about specific types of people or certain ways of doing things that may or may not accurately reflect reality. Often stereotypes are negative.

- A gender stereotype is something that people think is true about how others look, act, think, talk or feel because they are a certain gender. There are specific meanings associated with acting like a boy and acting like a girl.

How does it feel to be stereotyped? Why?

- Usually negative.
 - You aren't being seen the way you really are.
 - You are being judged by what someone else thinks.
 - Stereotypes limit our potential. This is not to say that boys shouldn't fix cars and that girls shouldn't cook. The problem is that we are told that we must perform these roles in order to fit in. It is important for all of us to make our own decisions about who we are, what we do, and how we relate to others.
2. Divide the class into small groups. Distribute one **Gender Stereotypes** scenario to each group.
 3. Ask each group to discuss the questions on their scenario and write down their answers.
 4. Ask each group to assign a spokesperson to read the scenario to the class and briefly share the group's discussion.
 5. Debrief this activity using the following questions:
 - What do you think the main differences will be between how we react to situations today versus how people might react in 20 years?
 - How can we explain the different ways people react to the same situations over time?
 - Are gender roles and our understanding of gender changing?
 - What can we do to change stereotypes?

E. Body Image Introduction

A fun and simple introduction to the idea of body image.

1. Ask each student to take a blank piece of paper and a pen, and place them on the desk.
2. Have students place the pen in the centre of the paper, look up and close their eyes. The remainder of this exercise should be completed with eyes closed.
3. Instruct students that they will need to listen to your instructions while you walk them through a self-portrait.

4. Follow this script:
 - Draw your head toward the top of the page.
 - Underneath this, draw your neck and body.
 - Now, attach arms and hands to both sides of your body.
 - Next, come the legs. Don't forget feet!
 - Going back up to your head, draw your hair.
 - Finally, add your eyes, mouth, ears and nose.
 - To complete this picture, draw your navel (bellybutton).
 - Open your eyes, and see what you've drawn.
5. Encourage students to share their self-portraits with neighbouring classmates.
6. Debrief this activity using the following questions:
 - Do your self-portraits look anything like your mirror image?
 - Do you think your mental image of yourself accurately reflects what you look like?
 - What influences the way we see ourselves?

The media influences how students perceive their body. Teachers can help students realize that comparing any part of their body to what they see on the internet, videogames, TV or other media can lead them to feel bad about themselves when their body is actually normal and healthy. This is true even for genitals; people's genitals vary in size and shape, and not everyone's genitals look the same or look like what are shown in diagrams, pictures, or other media.

F. Body Image and Media

Students increase awareness of the media's influences on self-image and behaviour. This activity could be done digitally using images found online and collected into a collage that can be displayed on-screen.

1. Divide the class into small groups of 3-5. Give each group a large piece of poster paper.
2. Ask each group to write the title 'Images of Beauty' on a piece of paper.
3. Ask each group to find pictures of people the group agrees are attractive. The pictures can be found in print sources like magazines or online. Have each group make a collage of these pictures underneath the title.
4. Ask groups to add words or phrases that describe an attractive person.

5. When groups are finished, have them post their collages on the board or wall.
6. Have students walk around the room looking at the collages.
7. Discuss the following questions:
 - Based on the images presented in the collages, what are some standards set by the media regarding beauty?
 - Is the media's ideal image of beauty realistic for most people? Why or why not?
 - What are some attractive qualities people can have that are not based on appearance? Are these qualities reflected in the collages?
 - What images of beauty are difficult to find?
 - Do all kinds of people see themselves reflected in media images of beauty?
 - Why do you think people might have a more critical self-image than reality?
 - How do media influence the image we have of ourselves? Family? Friends?
 - What are some ways we can combat negative perceptions we have of ourselves?
8. Share the following ideas for encouraging a healthy body image, if they were not already brought up in the discussion.
 - Treat your body with respect by keeping it strong and healthy.
 - Eat well-balanced meals and exercise to feel strong and able, not to change your body's size or shape to fit someone else's ideal.
 - Dress in clothes that fit the body you have and make you feel good about yourself.
 - Spend time with friends and family who are positive and like you for who you are as a person.
 - Write a list of the positive benefits of a body part or feature that you don't like. Focus on what your body can do.
 - Write a short message that helps you feel good about yourself. Post it around your house or room, make it your screensaver or wallpaper on a device, or ask a friend to text you the message

regularly.

- Be aware of how you talk about bodies with other people. Try to focus on positive attributes that aren't related to physical appearance.
- Be mindful of the media you consume and the messages sent by media about body image.
- Remember that everyone has challenges with their body image at times. Use positive self-talk when you find yourself being critical or judging yourself.

G. Question Box

Answer any questions from the [question box](#) in the previous lesson. Have students submit any new questions and address them next class.

Addressing the questions at the next class allows you time to review the questions and prepare responses.

Self-Reflection

During the lesson, were:

- ground rules being followed?
- good practices established regarding group work and discussion?

What will you change for future classes with this group?

What will you change for future use of this lesson?

Student Assessment

During the lesson, did students:

Knowledge:

- identify different sources of messages about sexuality?
- become more aware of the appropriateness of the sexual messages sent by the media to adolescents?
- define gender stereotypes?
- identify common gender stereotypes?
- recall healthy body image messages?

- examine the effects of media on self-image and behaviour?

Skills:

- participate in class discussion and exhibit appropriate listening and speaking skills?
- decipher different messages about sexuality?
- describe how gender roles change over time?
- examine how gender roles affect the ways people deal with themselves and others?
- develop strategies to react to situations that reinforce gender stereotypes?
- challenge negative influences regarding body image?
- create a positive, realistic picture of themselves?

Attitudes:

- accept responsibility for challenging and changing negative gender stereotypes?
- begin to articulate self-acceptance?

Sex in Advertising

When sexuality is used in advertising, certain values and attitudes towards sexuality and sexual activity are sold to consumers along with the products.

To analyze an ad, ask yourself “What underlying message is being sold by this ad?”

1. Choose an advertisement to analyze.
2. Use these questions to discuss the ad you are analyzing.
 - What product or service is the ad selling?
 - Who is the target audience for this ad? (Include age range, culture, gender, race, socio-economic level)
 - What can the product or service actually do vs. what does it promise to do?
 - What does the ad suggest or imply that the product can do?
 - What underlying message or value is being sold by the ad? Is it obvious or subliminal?
 - Do you agree/disagree with this message?
 - What do people in the ad look like?
 - What message does the ad give about sexuality?
 - Is this a positive or negative message about sexuality?
3. Present your advertisement to the class and share your thoughts about the underlying messages in the ad.

Me vs. TV

How much time do you spend watching TV (including Netflix, YouTube and movies) each week? When you add up the total, you might be surprised! Comparing your life to that of characters shown on TV can be an interesting exercise.

1. Choose a show from TV, Netflix, YouTube, etc.
2. Write the name of the show in the blank in the right-hand column.
3. Use the following chart to compare your life to the life of the characters represented by the show.

Me	TV: _____
My day at school:	TV day at school:
My after-school life:	TV after-school life:
My friends:	TV friends:
My parents or other family members:	TV parents or other family members:
My _____:	TV _____:

What is one important part of your life that is not shown on most of the shows/movies you watch?

Gender Stereotypes 1

Mike is about to ask Lennon out for the first time. He plans to suggest they go out for pizza and then go to a movie. Mike is unsure if he should offer to pay Lennon's way on their date or just assume they'll split the costs between them.

Discuss these questions:

- What does paying on a date have to do with gender? Where do those ideas come from?
- What do you think Mike should do?
- How do you think people will react to this situation 20 years from now?

Gender Stereotypes 2

Tshepo is babysitting a little boy named Ramone, age 6. Ramone's favourite toy is a Barbie doll he got from a cousin. Tshepo isn't sure if Ramone should be playing with a doll.

Discuss these questions:

- Why do you think Tshepo is unsure about letting Ramone play with a doll?
- What beliefs do people have about boys and dolls?
- What do you think Tshepo should do?
- How do you think people will react to this situation 20 years from now?

Gender Stereotypes 3

Jaya has a new friend this year, named Cam. They both love skateboarding, have the same taste in music and comics, and have fun hanging out after school. Cam is non-binary and uses they/them pronouns. Jaya's parents say that people are either boys or girls and that is it, and don't want Jaya to spend any time with Cam.

Discuss these questions:

- Why do you think Jaya's parents are worried about Jaya spending time with Cam?
- What do you think Jaya should do?
- How do you think people will react to this situation 20 years from now?

Gender Stereotypes 4

Your 9-year old cousin Dave knows she is a girl. Dave was assigned male at birth and everyone thinks she is a boy. Dave wants to be called Danae, wear girl's clothes, and use she/her pronouns.

Discuss these questions:

- How could you describe your cousin's gender?
- How would you react to this situation now?
- How do you think people will react to this situation 20 years from now?

Gender Stereotypes 5

Your best friend, Alex, wants to get married and start having kids as soon as they graduate from high school.

Discuss these questions:

- What beliefs do people have about the right age to get married and have kids?
- How would you react to this situation now?
- How do you think people will react 20 years from now?

Gender Stereotypes 6

Your friend Harper loves to play soccer and has played with you and your friends for years. Harper is a trans girl, and wants to play on the girls' school team. Harper isn't sure if the school will let her play on the girls' team.

Discuss the following two questions:

- Why might Harper be worried about this?
- What are some reasons trans athletes are sometimes not allowed to play on a team that matches their gender?
- What do you think the school should do?
- How do you think people will react to this situation 20 years from now?