

Fantasy or Reality? How Sexually Explicit Media Affects How We See Relationships IRL

A Lesson Plan from Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Curriculum

Fostering responsibility by respecting young people's rights to honest sexuality education.

NSES ALIGNMENT:

By the end of 12th grade, students will be able to:

CHR.12.CC.1 – Describe the characteristics of unhealthy relationships that media, including sexually explicit media, may perpetuate.

CHR.12.INF.1 – Analyze how media portrayals of healthy and unhealthy relationships impact societal norms about romantic and/ or sexual relationships and pleasure*

IV.12.INF.1 – Analyze how peers, family, media, society, culture, and a person's intersecting identities can influence attitudes and beliefs about interpersonal and sexual violence*

TARGET GRADE: Grade 12
Lesson 5

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Desktop or laptop computer with PowerPoint on it
- Internet connection
- **PowerPoint: "Fantasy vs. Reality"**
- Speakers to project audio from the computer
- Double-sided, color copies of slides 8 and 10, one per student (Men's Health and Cosmo Pages)
- Worksheet: "Sex in the Media: What are the Impacts?" – one per student
- White board and markers (at least two markers of different colors)
- Extra pencils in case students don't have their own

ADVANCE PREPARATION FOR LESSON:

Make sure you can access and preview the following videos:

- YouTube Liquid-Plumr Commercial Double Impact "Two Sexy Plumrs"
<https://youtu.be/wlaRPIsHpJE>
- YouTube: New Dentyne Ice Commercial Pharmacy
<https://youtu.be/QOiyYZI1cf0>

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Define what sexually explicit media is and how it is part of everyday television and ads. [Knowledge]
2. Explain at least four ways in which media representations of sex and sexuality can affect sexual and romantic relationships. [Knowledge]

Note to the Teacher: Even though no sexually explicit photographs are shown, two of the slides showing bathing suit-clad people are covers of pornographic magazines. These images were readily available on the internet, and are no more explicit than the magazine covers shown alongside them. It would still, however, be a good idea to get confirmation from your supervisor that it is acceptable for you to teach this lesson and show the images in the PowerPoint.

This lesson looks at stereotypes about "men" and "women", as presented in the media, so this is the language we are using. The worksheet asks students to also assess media representation of "transgender people" although none are depicted. During class discussion, students may realize that transgender people are held to the same rigid binary of attractiveness that cisgender people are, where "passing" as cisgender is considered attractive. The discussion of relationships uses "person" and "partner" as social pressures may affect all kinds of romantic and sexual relationships. This is intended to make the curriculum inclusive of all genders and gender identities.

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PROCEDURE:

STEP 1: Begin the class by saying, “Today, we’re going to be talking about something many of you have seen, most of you will at some point see, and all of you have at least heard of: sexually-explicit media.” Say, “The first thing that comes to mind tends to be porn – the stuff that’s on the internet – the stuff that is not supposed to be viewed by people your age, yet often is – let’s talk about the sexually-explicit images we see every day.”

Open the PowerPoint presentation, *Fantasy vs. Reality*, and show the Liquid Plumr commercial, the link for which is on the first slide. Ask for reactions.

Say, “Sexually explicit images in advertising are nothing new – companies have been using sex to sell all sorts of things for years.” Go to slide 2 and ask, “Why do you think this company uses this image to sell its burgers, rather than this one?” Go to slide 3. Student responses will include, “Sex sells,” or “because people like to look at a sexy woman eating a burger,” among others. As students respond, push them to connect their responses to the sexual component – why does sex sell? How does seeing a sexy woman connect to wanting to eat a huge burger like that?

Go to slide 4 and play the ad for Dentyne Ice. Say, “Sometimes, it’s not the actual depiction of sex, but just innuendo – like the Liquid Plumr ad. What are both ads suggesting?” Probe for the Liquid Plumr is suggesting a stereotypical porn video, with the music played, the narrator’s voice and the suggestive language and actions, and that the Dentyne Ice commercial is suggesting someone buying condoms.

Ask, “All of this is designed to get our attention, to be humorous, to make us think of sex – and therefore, to make us want to buy a particular product. But what’s the difference between what we see in advertising and what would be considered sexually explicit?” (6 minutes)

STEP 2: Go to slide 6 and ask, “What is the difference between these two pictures – of Rihanna on the cover of *GQ* and of a contestant in a beauty pageant” – go to slide 7 – “and these two covers of *Playboy* magazine?”

Go to slide 8 and ask, “What is the difference between these covers of *Cosmopolitan* and *New York*” – go to slide 9 – “and these covers of *Penthouse*?” Go to slide 10 and say, “Here are covers of health and fitness magazines” – go to slide 11 – “and here are covers of sexually explicit magazines.”

Go to slide 11 and say, “The legal definition of porn is, ‘the depiction of sexual behavior that is intended to arouse sexual excitement in its audience.’ So given what you just saw, how would you define the difference between what we just saw and what porn is?” (9 minutes)

STEP 3: Say, “Plenty of images today on tv, online, in magazines and elsewhere are very sexual in nature. They get right up to the edge of what is allowable in the media. We’re going to take a minute now to look at the possible messages that these sexual images communicate.”

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Divide the class into groups of 3. Tell them that you are going to give each group copies of two of the slides from the PowerPoint you just shared, along with a worksheet with questions on it. Distribute the “Sex in the Media: What are the Impacts” worksheet and ask them to work together to complete it, explaining that they will have about 8 minutes in which to work together. As they are working, write the following three headings on the whiteboard:

For Men

For Transgender People

For Women

(4 minutes)

STEP 4: After about 8 minutes, ask groups to stop their small group work. Ask:

- What was it like to do that? What was [insert student responses] about it?
- Did you notice you agreed on much of what you observed? When you disagreed, how did you manage that?

Ask for students from each group to volunteer to share responses to question number one. Record responses on the board. When you go into question number two, write the class’s perceptions of impact to the right of the first brainstorm in a marker of a different color.

Finally, ask what they think the potential impacts of these expectations are on romantic and sexual relationships. This discussion will vary from class to class, but you will want to probe for:

- People may expect sex to go a certain way and feel unprepared for or vulnerable when it does not go as expected
- People may think that roughness or violence in sex is typical or expected because they saw it depicted that way in media
- People may assume consent from their partner instead of asking.
- People may not realize how important it is to talk about sex as well as about feelings before and during, because this isn’t usually modeled in the media
- People may not think about contraception or safer sex because it is rarely discussed or depicted in the media
- People may expect their or their partner’s body to respond in a certain way sexually and be concerned if it does not because that is how it’s depicted in the media
- People may engage in behaviors they might not otherwise have done because they consider porn and the media “to do” lessons rather than fantasies
- People may be disappointed by how their partner looks naked or be worried that their own body will disappoint their partner based on what they have seen in porn and other media.

(22 minutes)

STEP 5: Go through the remaining PowerPoint slides. Once you have shared the take-home messages, ask students whether they have any they would add to those, and close the class.

(9 minutes)

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RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

The PowerPoint will achieve both learning objectives; the remainder of the lesson will achieve the second learning objective.

HOMEWORK:

None.

Worksheet

Sex in the Media: What are the Impacts?

INSTRUCTIONS: Please respond to the following questions in your small group. See what you can do to reach agreement, and if you do not, write a star next to those contributions you did not agree on.

1. Based on these magazine covers, what would you say the dominant US culture finds attractive?

In Men

In Transgender People

In Women

2. What do you think the impacts are on the people who may not look like the pictures on these covers?

For Men

For Transgender People

For Women

3. In what ways could what we see on magazine covers – or depicted in other sexually explicit images – have an impact on romantic and sexual relationships?