

The Impact of Racism and Inequality on Sexual Health

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:

SH.10.INF.1 - Describe the impact of racism and inequality on sexual health

TARGET GRADE: High School

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Computer with Projector, Screen and Speakers
- Internet Access
- Copies of the worksheet - The Impact of Racism and Inequality on Sexual Health - one per student
- Flip Chart Paper or White Board
- Flip Chart Markers or Dry Erase Marker

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

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

1. Explain how the sexual health and reproductive rights of people of color and other marginalized groups in the U.S. have been impacted by racism and inequality. [Knowledge]
2. List at least three examples of how people from marginalized US communities have experienced violations of their reproductive rights and sexual health. [Knowledge]
3. Describe at least one example of how marginalized people in the U.S. have been denied opportunities to make decisions about their sexual health. [Knowledge]

LESSON RATIONALE:

Racism and other forms of inequality (e.g., sexism, ableism, ageism, classism, and differing religion) have been used as a means of oppression throughout history in the United States. Racism and inequality have been woven into federal, state, and local policies, laws, and practices, both past and present, resulting in a disproportionate impact on the sexual health outcomes and reproductive rights of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), and other people from marginalized communities. Young people have the right to live in a society that consists of equitable systems that will lead to positive sexual health outcomes. By examining and discussing the impact of racism and inequality, educators can provide opportunities for awareness and advocacy that may encourage systematic change and lead to a more equitable society.

ADVANCED PREPARATION:

Prior to the lesson, you should become familiar with the media content used to teach the information. The amount of time needed to watch the video and read the news article should be about 15 minutes.

- YouTube Video: ***The Dark History of Forced Sterilization*** by BreakThrough News: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhPAs8bOeBg> (7:03 minutes).
- The resources bulleted below are provided to prepare educators with background information that will support this lesson. Although the information shared in the listed resources are incorporated in the lesson, the resources themselves are not a part of the lesson. The video begins by highlighting the account of forced sterilizations in a U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facility in Georgia.

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A link to the NPR podcast episode “ICE, A Whistleblower and Forced Sterilization” is linked below to provide more information about examples of the most recent reproductive and sexual rights violations in U.S. history. The podcast, timed at 33:55 minutes, gives an account of sexual and reproductive health-related medical mistreatment experienced by some people detained by U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). You will not have time to play the podcast during the lesson; however, you should use its content to introduce this information to your students. Discussing this recent sexual and reproductive health violation will help students make the connection between the past and the present day. Trigger Warning: Certain details shared in the podcast may be considered triggering for some students and educators.

- NPR Podcast Episode: ICE, A Whistleblower and Forced Sterilization linked here: <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/18/914465793/ice-a-whistleblower-and-forced-sterilization> (33:55 minutes).
- Read the ACLU article here: [Immigration Detention and Coerced Sterilization: History Tragically Repeats Itself \(2020, September 29\)](#)

A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE AND VIDEO CONTENT

The YouTube Video: ***The Dark History of Forced Sterilization*** by BreakThrough News was produced in 2021. Since that time, there have been significant changes in language and how we discuss sexual violence. At the 1:16 time mark, the video uses the term “rape” in reference to the forced sterilization of a young woman who had a child out of wedlock.

It is also important to note that the video references infamous historical figure Adolf Hitler at the 1:53 time mark.

Although this lesson can be used as a standalone, it is more effective when used in collaboration with the additional lessons that discuss racism, inequality, and reproductive justice including: Reproductive Justice - Past, Present, Future; What’s Racism Got to Do With It?; and Sexual Agency: Represent!

PROCEDURE:

STEP 1:

Before the lesson begins, pass out the worksheet ***The Impact of Racism and Inequality on Sexual Health*** to each student.

Introduce the lesson by saying “**Today we are going to examine the impact that racism and inequality have on the sexual and reproductive health of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) as well as other people from marginalized communities. Other marginalized groups of people include people with disabilities, people who are incarcerated, or people who are classified as having fewer economic resources (or live in economically-overburdened communities). Can you think of other marginalized groups who may be impacted by inequality?**” Students should provide examples of marginalized groups in the U.S. at this time. Examples of marginalized groups that students may mention include but are not limited to the following: People with trans identities, people

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with LGBTQI+ identities, people who identify with non-Christian faiths (specifically people who practice Islam). As students list other marginalized groups of people, use a marker to write each example on the board or on the flip chart paper. Be sure to include the examples provided on the list: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), people with differing abilities, people who are incarcerated, and people who are classified as low income.

Say **“Okay, now that we have identified groups of people who experience racism and inequality, let us look at how racism and inequality have impacted their sexual and reproductive health. To help us with that, we are going to watch a YouTube video called *The Dark History of Forced Sterilization*. Before we watch the video, we need to review some terms that you will hear. You will hear the terms reproductive rights and eugenics mentioned in the video. The first term, reproductive rights, is defined as a person having the ability to make decisions regarding their reproductive health and to determine if, when, and under what circumstances they will or will not become a parent. The second term is eugenics. Eugenics is defined as the practice of controlling a group of people’s abilities to create children and become parents. Are there any questions about the terms we just reviewed?”** Give your students a minute or two to ask any clarifying questions about the terminology.

(10 minutes)

STEP 2:

Once students have asked any clarifying questions and the questions have been answered, tell the students that you are about to play the video. Tell them to pay attention to the content provided because they will be asked to complete the worksheet by listing at least three (3) of the many examples of racism and inequality discussed in the video. Use your computer with the projector and speakers to play the YouTube video: ***The Dark History of Forced Sterilization*** by BreakThrough News by using the following link: **<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHPAs8bOeBg>**.

(8 minutes)

STEP 3:

After the video finishes playing, say **“Now that we have watched the YouTube video: *The Dark History of Forced Sterilization*, let us examine some of the examples that were mentioned in the video. You have a worksheet in front of you. You are going to complete Part A of the worksheet by listing at least three (3) examples of reproductive health and sexual health violations that were talked about in the video. For each example, you should also determine what group or groups of people were impacted and how they were impacted. I will give you five (5) minutes to complete that portion of your worksheet.”** Give your students five (5) minutes to complete Part A of the worksheet. After the 5 minutes, ask students to share examples of reproductive health and sexual health violations that they listed on their worksheet. Students may have listed any three (3) of the ten (10) examples listed below. If students do not list all the examples featured in the video, you should reiterate them because they are all equally important.

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Note to the Educator: *The bolded term provided in the examples below indicate the opportunity to introduce socially just terminology that is used to respect and empower people. Let students know that they may have heard people identified one way; however, the bolded term is the proper term.*

The examples provided below can also be used to support information covered in the Reproductive Justice - Past, Present, and Future lesson for Indicator #SH.10.CC. 6.

List of examples from the video:

1. Some members of society classified other members as unfit to reproduce. Populations considered to be unfit included people with low income, people of color, and **people with differing intellectual abilities**. Supporters of eugenics believed that lowering the birth rate of the “unfit” would eliminate undesirable traits among the population which would improve the country and society.
2. The practice of forced sterilizations was institutionalized by the United States Supreme Court in the 1927 Buck versus Bell case when the court allowed the State of Virginia to carry out compulsory sterilizations.
3. More than 30 states in the country adopted mandatory sterilization laws.
4. Unnecessary hysterectomies (nicknamed Mississippi Appendectomies) on Black women were common practice and largely preformed at teaching hospitals as training for medical students. Renowned civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer was victimized in 1961.
5. Between the 1930s and 1970s, North Carolina sterilized over 7,600 people. Sixty-five percent were Black women. A third of the sterilizations were done on girls under 18 and as young as nine years old.
6. Approximately 20,000 forced sterilizations took place in California and targeted women with Spanish surnames. Many of these women were of Mexican descent.
7. In 1976, it was reported that 1 in 3 Puerto Rican women of child bearing age had been sterilized by coercion or without their consent.
8. A 2010 study reported that as many as 25 to 50 percent of Indigenous (Native) women were sterilized by the U.S. Indian Health Service (IHS) between the years of 1970 and 1976 alone.
9. From 2006 to 2010, 150 people were sterilized in California State prisons; majority were Black and Latina.
10. An untold number of immigrant detainees in U.S. Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) facilities may have received unnecessary hysterectomies. (Note: This example will be discussed below.)

Say “**You all provided some great examples from the video. Good job. One thing I want to point out, although the video discussed women being the victims of reproductive health and sexual health violations, people of all biological sexes experienced these types of violations.**”

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Now, the video shared that even though the federal government moved to limit federal funds in the use of sterilization, practices that violate the reproductive rights and sexual health of marginalized groups of people continue into the present day. Have any of you heard about any examples of these types of practices?” Give the students a minute or two to respond to the question by providing an example of reproductive rights or sexual health-related violations that may have occurred. Students may provide examples that they have heard about including the example of the reproductive rights and sexual health violation that you will mention next.

Say **“The video mentioned the most recent example of reproductive rights violations. These violations happened to immigrants from Mexico and other countries in Central America in 2020. It was reported that some people with vaginas and uteri who were detained by U.S. Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) were forcibly sterilized or received medical-mistreatment during reproductive health/sexual health medical exams. The medical mistreatment included ignoring the sexual health issues of the people detained and not getting them immediate medical attention, rough pelvic exams, and removing their uteri without their consent. So, as you can see, these violations against people have been happening for a long time and continue to happen.”**

Say **“Remember, making the decision about when, and under what circumstances you will or will not become a parent is called reproductive rights. People’s reproductive rights are all about choice and being empowered to make decisions about what will happen to their bodies and what is right for them. When people’s reproductive rights are violated, they also are denied opportunities to make decisions about their sexual health.** For example (Note: Select the example(s) that you would like to highlight. You do not have to list all the examples below; this is based on time and your discretion):

- 1. The immigrants from Mexico and other Central American countries who were detained by ICE did not have a choice on what doctors they could see for their sexual health and reproductive health needs.***
- 2. People who are incarcerated are denied the choice on what doctors they can see for their sexual health and reproductive needs. This example was highlighted when the video discussed the people in the California prison system who were medically mistreated.***
- 3. Some people who were convicted of certain crimes were forced to use contraceptives that were required to be inserted into their bodies or face harsher punishment. They did not get the choice of what type of contraceptive they wanted to use if they wanted to use them at all.*** (Educator Note: This example could be used to also promote a deeper discussion about the potential of adverse medical reactions to a contraceptive method, but a person does not have access to the medical services needed to remove it.)
- 4. Some doctors continue to coerce (force or manipulate) low-income women of color to use contraceptives and deny them the choice of what methods of contraceptive they would like to use, if any method at all.*** (Educator Note: Long-Acting Reversible Contraceptives (LARCs) have been beneficial for many people; however, “they also have a controversial history. LARCs and programs to promote their use have been—and continue to be—used by the state to control the fertility of Black, Indigenous and other people of color, people

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with disabilities and people with low incomes.” (Direct excerpt from <https://www.gutmacher.org/gpr/2021/05/powerful-contraception-complicated-programs-preventing-coercive-promotion-long-acting>).

"These are just a few examples of how racism and inequality have and continue to impact the reproductive rights and sexual health of people."

(20 minutes)

STEP 4:

Conclude the lesson by asking students the following discussion questions:

- What did you learn by completing this lesson?
- What kind of thoughts or feelings did you have when you learned about how racism and inequality has impacted people's ability to make decisions about their bodies (reproductive and sexual health)?
- How would you teach somebody about the impact of racism and inequality on society?
- Why do you think this lesson was important?
- How would you advocate for people who have experienced violations of their sexual health and reproductive rights?

(12 minutes)

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

Learning objective 1 will be accomplished by watching the ***The Dark History of Forced Sterilization***. Learning objective 2 will be accomplished by watching the ***The Dark History of Forced Sterilization*** and completing the worksheet. Learning objective 3 will be accomplished by watching the ***The Dark History of Forced Sterilization***, completing the worksheet, and completing the homework assignment.

HOMEWORK:

See handout for directions and activity.

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REFERENCES:

- The Dark History of Forced Sterilization by BreakThrough News. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhPAs8bOeBg>. (Time: 7:30) (YouTube Video).
- Immigration Detention and Coerced Sterilization: History Tragically Repeats Itself (2020, September 29) (ACLU Article) <https://www.aclu.org/news/immigrants-rights/immigration-detention-and-coerced-sterilization-history-tragically-repeats-itself>
- ICE, A Whistleblower and Forced Sterilization by NPR: <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/18/914465793/ice-a-whistleblower-and-forced-sterilization> (33:55 minutes) (NPR Podcast Episode).
- Powerful Contraception, Complicated Programs: Preventing Coercive Promotion of Long-Acting Reversible Contraceptive: <https://www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2021/05/powerful-contraception-complicated-programs-preventing-coercive-promotion-long-acting> (Guttmacher Policy Review, Vol. 24, May 10, 2021).

The Impact of Racism and Inequality on Sexual Health Worksheet

Provide at least three (3) examples mentioned in the video of how Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) people and other marginalized groups experienced violations of their reproductive rights or sexual health.

EXAMPLE 1

What group or groups of people were impacted in this example?

How was this group or groups of people impacted?

EXAMPLE 2

What group or groups of people were impacted in this example?

How was this group or groups of people impacted?

EXAMPLE 3

What group or groups of people were impacted in this example?

How was this group or groups of people impacted?
