

Media Literacy Roadmap

Topic: Sexism and Gender - Target Audience: Grades 5-7

Materials needed: Large-scale printout of Courageous Conversations with room for signatures; Sticky notes; Chart paper & markers; Printouts of words for the “spectrum”: “Good example”, “Gray zone,” “Bad example.”

Introduction & Setup:

Introduce the main topics, to be explored over two half-day sessions:

- Understanding how our favourite media (movies, TV shows, video games, music videos, websites, social media and merchandise) create ideas and “constructs” of gender;
- Learning how to spot and define a stereotype when you see it
- Understanding the definition of sexism and how it appears in media

Introduce **Courageous Conversations*** framework and the idea that these discussions may be sensitive, and that we need to agree to certain rules to proceed:

1. Stay engaged: Staying engaged means “remaining morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue.”
2. Experience discomfort: This norm acknowledges that discomfort is inevitable, especially, in dialogue about difficult and personal topics, and that participants make a commitment to bring issues into the open. It is not talking about these issues that create divisiveness. The divisiveness already exists in the society and in our schools. It is through dialogue, even when uncomfortable, the healing and change begin.
3. Speak your truth: This means being open about thoughts and feelings and not just saying what you think others want to hear.
4. Expect and accept non-closure: This agreement asks participants to “hang out in uncertainty” and not rush to quick solutions, as understanding requires ongoing dialogue.

Give students a moment to discuss these agreements, and to work as a class to add any agreements they wish.

Ask all students to make a pledge and sign the Courageous Conversations agreement sheet.

* Courageous Conversations framework is borrowed from Glenn E. Singleton and Curtis Linton’s **Courageous Conversations About Race**.

Warm-up Activity:

Role model brainstorm experiment - Have students start by individually brainstorming their media-based role models from TV shows, films, video games, etc. (can be characters or real-life celebrity personalities), writing names down on sticky notes and underneath the name, identifying the traits they most admire about that person.

- After completed, students will post their sticky notes on the appropriate chart papers (revealed at this point), identified by Male-Female-Transgender/Spectrum/Other.
- Facilitate a discussion of the results: the numbers in each category, the desired traits of each gender/identification, and why they think certain traits are identified with this person or gender (as patterns appear). Do the students see patterns?

Activity #1:

Small group activity: Ask students to work in groups to find a possible definition for the word “stereotype.”

- After discussing these ideas, if not already covered, share that stereotypes are "fixed" or "set" beliefs about a group of people, and that when we apply stereotypes, we assume that all members of a group are the same. With gender stereotypes, all members of a certain gender are expected to behave in line with those stereotypes, even when they may not fit into those categories.

Small (then full) group discussion: What kind of issues can stereotypes create? Can you think of examples in your own life when you or someone you know has been expected to live up to a stereotype? What happened?

- After the discussion, if not already brought up, share with students that stereotypes create an incomplete or misleading picture, based on generalizations about groups of people that ignore the diverse traits and abilities of individuals. We are then sometimes “policed” by our community, trying to force us to fit into these stereotypes.

Small (then full) group discussion: Ask students to pretend to be “Gender Police”: what language have they heard used by someone taking on this role? Where do you think they heard this language? What impact does it have?

Distribute iPads and ask students to find clips, websites, posters, advertisements or other media-based examples of characters or story lines that clearly reinforce or even police stereotypes for different genders.

- Students will display iPads loaded with their best examples, then do a Gallery Walk to see different examples that others brainstormed.

Activity #2:

Have students write down the names of characters in various films, TV shows and video games on sticky notes, then take those character names and place them on a life-sized spectrum somewhere within the good example - grey zone - bad example of stereotype reinforcement. In small groups, have students explain their choices.

- Screen ads from each category and have the students discuss for what specific reasons they agree (or disagree) that they might belong in each group, keeping in mind both story and technical elements:
 - Old Spice Ad (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaOz_pFnX38)
 - Yoplait Commercial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdRLYqP7ZoM>
 - Planet Fitness (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqkQKZYDImM>)
 - Kia Sorrento Pierce Brosnan (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSqqCIOLNHs>)
 - Hyundai Genesis (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGrR92sulx0>)
 - Always #LikeAGirl campaign (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjJQBjWYDTs>)

Students share their key learning on the topic of stereotyping and gender policing by taking time to write a short, private journal entry about their own experiences.

Activity #3:

Introduce the key goal for this activity: Understanding sexism in media and how to reduce its impact.

Review the **Courageous Conversations** framework and the agreements made.

Small group activity: Ask students to work in groups to find a definition for the word “sexism.”

- After discussing student ideas, if not already covered, share that sexism is when stereotypes are used to discriminate, devalue or be prejudiced against someone based on their (assumed) gender. This is often referred to as specifically being against women and trans people, because sexism most commonly occurs in this form, living in a society that is still working towards equality for people of all genders.

Personal brainstorming, then small group discussion: Where and when do you think you may have you seen or experienced sexism before? Where do you think these experiences come from? Where did the people involved come by their beliefs? Does media play a role?

- Group discussions can explore real-life experiences as well as media-based or media-inspired experiences, and should focus on both language/words and actions.

Activity #4:

Small (then full) group discussions: How does sexism appear (and how are sexist attitudes reinforced) in the media? (*Ensure that students explore various forms of media and stories.*)

- Share the “Bechdel Test” for media analysis and discuss why it was developed:
 - Are there at least two female characters who have lines?
 - Do they talk to each other at any point?
 - Is there a conversation about anything other than the men?

Activity #5:

Screening and small group discussion for each clip: How do these clips make you feel? (*N.B. Acknowledge that for young men it’s also easy to feel defensive and even angry, though you are not to blame and are only in control of your own actions. As young women it’s sometimes easy to feel defensive too, as we don’t often like to feel powerless.*) Do you think these issues play out in your own life? If yes, how do you experience sexism? what does it mean to you?

- The Mask You Live In trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hc45-ptHMxo>
- Tough Guise 2 Intro (0:00-1:22): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ro5L6kYDm4>
- Dove Onslaught: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ei6JvKOW60I>
- Cause and Effect: How the Media You Consume Can Change Your Life: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hv5Z2Xv8iJU>

Activity #6:

The final clip ended with solutions and ways we can help to remedy the issues of sexism and reduce its impact. Writing on sticky notes, students brainstorm and share ways that they can work to both remove sexism in their lives and amongst their friends and communities.

Session Conclusion:

Students share their key learning on the topic of sexism and the impacts of stereotypes by taking time to write a short, private journal entry about their own experiences.