

LESSON: Image of Women in the Media

Overview

“Throughout U.S. culture, and particularly in mainstream media, women and girls are depicted in a sexualizing manner. These representations can be seen in virtually every medium.” (Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, 2010, p.4. Much of the Task Force’s report focuses on media and its influences on sexualization.

This lesson focuses on a concept known as “self objectification” where girls learn to think of and treat their own bodies as objects of others’ desires. Sexually objectifying images of women can be regularly viewed across all types of media that teens consume from their music and the barrage of images available via the Internet to TV programs and movies they watch and magazines they read.

Girls, having internalized how an observer views their physical selves, learn to treat themselves as objects to be looked at and evaluated for their appearance. According to Objectification Theory, the girl adopts a third-person perspective on her physical self, constantly assessing her own body in an effort to conform to cultural standards of attractiveness. The cultural standard of “sexy” can lead a girl to evaluate and control her body more in terms of sexual desirability to others than in terms of her own desires, health, wellness, achievements or competence.

There is considerable evidence that self-objectification is common among girls and women. For example, Slater and Tiggemann (2002) have even found that girls as young as 12 years old placed greater emphasis on their body’s appearance than on its competence. To learn more about self objectification and the ways in which it is influencing the sexualization of our young women, see the APA Task Force Report on Sexualization of Girls.

In this lesson, students are encouraged to find examples of the media portrayal of objectification of women and to bring some of their examples for a class showcase. Boys in the class will be asked to not only consider the impact on females but also how this issue can affect males. All class members will then be encouraged to present their views about this issue during a class debate, supporting their differing views with research findings and the views of experts in different disciplines working with children.

Objectives:

- Create awareness of objectification of women in the media and its implications for cultural attitudes as well as behavior of both males and females
- Find media examples of objectification of women (e.g. TV, movies, music, magazines, etc.)
- Deconstruct these examples considering the kinds of messages they convey about sexuality
- Research and record the views of experts and those studying the impact of objectification
- Analyze differing perspectives about the influence of objectification and reflect on their own personal views about this issue.
- Participate in a class debate about the potential influence of these media portrayals
- About Face website

Level: High School

Time: 1 class period: Part 1 only
3 class periods: Parts 1 and 2
5+ class periods: Parts 1, 2, 3

Preparation and Materials:

- Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, 2010
- Video Clip from Thomas Keith’s Film: *Generation M: Misogyny in Media & Culture*
- Jean Kilbourne video clips including:
 - Killing Us Softly 4
 - Killing Us Softly 3
- Video Clip from Dreamworlds 3: *Desire, Sex & Power in Music Video*

Procedures

Open the discussion about portrayal of women in the media by showing a video clip from Jean Kilbourne's *Killing Us Softly 4*. Depending on the amount of time you are able to devote to this topic, you may also want to show pieces from some of the other videos listed above such as Thomas Keith's Film: *Generation M: Misogyny in Media & Culture*.

Now turn to the **About Face website**. Discuss the website's mission and then explore sections of this site.

Activities

PART 1: IDENTIFYING MEDIA EXAMPLES

Tell the class that their assignment is to:

- Find at least 5 media examples that objectify women (i.e. in music video, TV, magazines, movies, etc.)
- Deconstruct these examples considering the kinds of messages they convey about sexuality and summarize your conclusions in writing or verbally using a recording device of your choice.
- Be prepared to present at least one of these examples to the class

Discuss some of the examples students have found.

PART 2: RESEARCH PROJECT

Several people have written and spoken about their views concerning the objectification of women. Students have heard some of these views expressed in the film clips you've shown the class. '

Now their task is to express their own views on this topic:

- Conduct your own research to find experts and those who have dedicated time to studying the issue of objectification of women and its implications/impact.
- Write an essay summarizing your findings. Be sure to include documentation of your sources. (Stress to your students what will be considered valid and reliable sources for their research findings.)

Discuss findings in class.

PART 3: THE DEBATE

By this time, students may have formed some strong opinions on the subject of objectification of women in media. Part Three gives students a chance to share and debate their views.

Divide the class into two teams. (You may wish to divide the class into subgroups that each would be asked to form 2 teams. With subgroups, more students will have the opportunity to speak about their views).

- Students must choose the side they want to represent: Team A will argue the view that objectification of women is having a great impact on cultural attitudes and behaviors while Team B will refute this view, supporting the idea that there is little or no impact.
- In preparation for the debate, encourage team members to analyze their differing perspectives about the influence of objectification and reflect on their own personal views about this issue before sharing their views with teammates.

- Teams should each prepare a draft of points/issues they wish to raise during the debate.
- Hold the class debate.

Assessment

Among the parts of this lesson unit that can (could be) used as a basis for assessment are the deconstruction of the media examples found in Part One and the presentation to the class of one of these examples, the essay summarizing research results in Part Two, and the student's oral contributions during the debate. In addition, if you wish, students could be asked prior to the debate in Part Three to summarize the views they hope to express for their team. This would allow all students the chance to express their views both verbally and in writing.