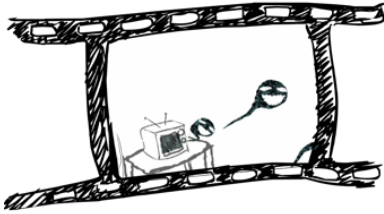


'Keep It Real'

Beauty, Diversity, & Identity: Navigating the media Landscape



This lesson explores the influence and impact that media has on one's identity and self-image. Students will screen the animation *Keep it Real* and have opportunities to discuss and reflect on how the cultural standards and expectations of gender identity and beauty are constructed and represented in the media and how they impact our thinking, behaviour and personal identities.

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Estimated Time: 1.5 - 2 hrs (2 class periods)



Goals

- ✓ To analyze factors (including media and peer) that influence personal health decisions
- ✓ To analyze how social, cultural, and historical contexts influence and are influenced by media images and messages
- ✓ To understand how cultural standards of gender identity and beauty are constructed
- ✓ To analyze the representation of diversity (ethnic and otherwise) across various media platforms
- ✓ To explore how Cultural Racism and Internalized Racism may impact our complex, personal identities



Prep/Materials

- DVD player
- Chalk or markers
- Sticky notes
- Poster board
- Set up an account on www.blogger.com or www.wordpress.com
- DVD of *Keep it Real*
- Chart paper
- Pens and coloured felts



Energizer: Where We Stand (10-15 minutes)



- ☆ Move the desks against walls to clear a large space in the middle of the classroom
- ☆ Tell students that one side of the room will represent “Strongly agree” and the opposite side “Strongly disagree”. The middle of the room represents parts of the continuum “in between”.
- ☆ Explain that you will be reading out a series of statements and that they will be asked to move to the side of the room that best reflects their belief or understanding of the statement. Challenge students not to follow their friends or try to influence others’ opinions and to move to their positions in silence. Let the students know that they are welcome to move from their original position to a new one if they feel that their opinions begin to change during the discussions.
- ☆ After reading out each statement (once the students have settled into their positions) ask a sampling of students from each ‘section’ to explain why they chose to stand where they are standing.



NOTE: If a student says something particularly provocative, or offensive, try to draw out the opinions, life experiences and knowledge in the room and keep the conversations between the students rather than responding directly to the student. Use probing phrases such as: “What does everyone think of that comment?” or “How do other people feel about that?” or “Does that ring true for others?” “Would anyone like to respond to that comment?” If this approach does not do justice to the subject matter, it is a good idea to inquire further with the student who first spoke from their place of ignorance/privilege/anger. Questions such as, “Are there exceptions to that?” “Where do you think you might have developed that opinion?” or other questions that acknowledge and honour the students’ voices and lead into a deeper discussion are often helpful.



Statements:

- ☆ “The mainstream media has a big impact on my self image”
- ☆ “There are a lot of different cultures represented in the mainstream media “
- ☆ “The diversity of Canada and the United States is reflected in North American media.”
- ☆ “The mainstream media’s definition of beauty includes (or doesn’t include) diversity “
- ☆ “I have wanted to change something about myself to fit in “
- ☆ There have been times when I felt consumed by media demons who wanted me to “fit in” and “be more like them”?
- ☆ “I have somebody in my life who talks to me about the messages in mainstream media”
- ☆ “I see a lot of people in the media I watch, read and listen to who look like me and my friends.”
- ☆ “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.”



Debrief Questions:

- For those who stood toward the “agree” side of the room when I made the statement, “I see a lot of people in the media I watch, read and listen to who look like me and my friends.” Describe how these people are typically portrayed, and in what instances do you come across these portrayals?
- For those closer to the “disagree side of the room”, “Why do you think there are so few people in the media who ‘look like you’?” How does this make you feel? What do you notice about how celebrities of colour are viewed by the public? What are the characteristics of these celebrities? How are the characteristics similar or different than White celebrities?

Activity 1: What I learned about gender identity (35-40 minutes)

(Adapted from lesson created by James Chamberlain)



1. Ask students to think back to earlier grades and childhood experiences and to ask themselves: What messages did your school, community or culture teach you about what men and women were supposed to look, act and sound like when you were younger?”
2. Have students do a silent write of one or two paragraphs about what they learned about ‘beauty and strength’; ‘masculinity and femininity’ or ‘what it meant to be a man or be a woman’.
3. Ask students to think back to the messages they first received about gender and relationships when they were growing up and explain how to complete the *What I learned about gender identity* chart individually. (see next page)
4. After completing their individual charts, ask them to share their ideas with a partner and tell them that they may be invited to share their thinking during the whole class debrief.



Debrief Questions:

- What were the most common messages about masculinity and femininity? How did these messages make you feel? How were your sources of information similar or different? Do you think these ‘social scripts’ are helpful/hurtful? In what ways?
- How did these messages affect your thinking and/or behaviour when you first learned them? How did they affect you later in life? How do they affect you now?
- Do you still hear about any of the messages we’ve discussed? If so, which ones and what are the sources?
- Are there new messages about gender identity that you hear today? What are the sources?

What I learned about gender identity...

Message about Gender: In a phrase, explain what you were specifically taught about masculinity and femininity; beauty and strength.

Source: Who or what told or taught these ideas or messages to you? (e.g. schoolyard, media, family, church, etc.)

Message impact: How might these ideas or messages have influenced or impacted your thinking or behaviour about your own gender identity or your perception of others? How might they have influenced or impacted your understanding of what's beautiful and how you understand or define strength?

Message about Gender	Source	Message Impact
Femininity (ideal qualities and mannerisms that women are supposed to possess)		
Masculinity (ideal qualities and mannerisms that men are supposed to possess)		
Beauty (what beauty is or looks, sounds and feels like)		
Strength (what strength is or looks, sounds and feels like)		
Other related gender Issues:		

Activity 2: Screening *Keep It Real* (15-20 minutes)



NOTE: *Keep It Real* is an animation that exposes the pressures experienced in a society that may not appreciate or value all cultures and types of beauty to the same degree. The girl portrayed in the film ultimately chooses to embrace her “true self” and her cultural heritage, thereby resisting the media messages which breed a sense of insecurity or inferiority.

Tell students that they will be screening *Keep It Real*, an animation that was made by youth that addresses some of the issues discussed in the first activity.



Debrief Questions:

- What are your general thoughts about the animation?
- What do you think were its main messages?
- Were you able to relate to the experience of the girl portrayed in the film? Explain.
- How might media play a role in spreading messages about gender identity?
- How might these messages impact those who either don't or don't want to conform to the gender norms?
- What might the title of the film suggest?

Activity 3: Creating or Reflecting Reality? (20-25 minutes)



1. Draw a T-chart on the board or create one using two pieces of chart paper with the headings “MALE” and “FEMALE”. Create seven rows across the two columns, and label them in the following order: “HAIR”, “EYES”, “SKIN”, “HEIGHT”, “BODY TYPE”, “CLOTHES/STYLE”, “PERSONALITY” and “ECONOMIC STATUS”

2. Provide each student with 3-4 sticky notes and ask them to select 3-4 categories from the board. Have them write down adjectives of what they believe to be society's expectations and ideals for the categories they've chosen for their particular gender. Ask them to think about as many adjectives as possible and that they may include phrases to add descriptive details. Once they have finished writing, ask them to place their sticky notes onto the proper place on the chart. If there are any blank sections left on the T-chart, leave them blank and address them during the debrief.



NOTE: Reiterate to students that we are discussing dominant cultural expectations and that they are not necessarily our beliefs of what is true or right or the way things 'should' be.



Debrief Questions:

- What are some general observations of these descriptions?
- Why do some of the categories include more descriptions than others? Why are some left blank?
- How are society's expectations and standards about gender and beauty created? Why are certain characteristics deemed favourable and others unfavourable?
- What are some specific examples in the media that create or reflect these gender expectations or ideals?
- Which descriptions do you agree or disagree with? Explain your thinking.
- What do you think the mainstream media and its advertizers gain by making us feel that we must fit into 'a norm'?
- Think back to your responses from the first activity about your earliest memories of gender and beauty identity. How many of these societal expectations or ideals that applied then still apply now? How might they influence/impact you today?



NOTE: Explain to students that these societal expectations and cultural standards of gender, beauty, competency etc. are examples of Cultural Racism, a type of racism which devalues the 'minority' cultures. Minority cultures are considered to be flawed or inferior in some way, and progress is considered to have been achieved when minority groups become absorbed by the majority or dominant culture. The majority culture is regarded as the 'norm' and superior to all others. For example, as we discovered in the previous activities, the cultural standard of beauty teaches us that a beautiful woman must be characterized by blond hair, blue eyes, slender build, height etc.

The danger of Cultural Racism is that it may lead to Internalized Racism, when individuals have been forced to perpetuate and agree to their own oppression, turning the patterns that result from racism from the dominant society upon themselves, their families, and their cultural communities.

For example, since the cultural standards of beauty is described by the above characteristics, one might desire to achieve them while devaluing their own (e.g. dyeing hair blond, losing weight, straightening hair, wearing coloured contact lenses, lightening skin colour etc.).



Debrief Questions:

After explaining these two new terms, engage students in the following debrief questions:

- How might you have been influenced/impacted by Cultural Racism? What can we do as individuals to counter the type of Cultural Racism that is perpetuated by media messages, expectations and standards.
- How might you have been influenced/impacted by Internalized Racism?



Wrap Up: (15 minutes)



☆ Invite students to do a silent write on the following questions in their reflection journals:

- What would you share if you were to tell a peer/friend about the impact of media on: your sense of self, your understanding of gender, your ideas about what is and is not beautiful and how you envision 'success'.
- What are you most proud of? What are you ashamed of? Where do these feelings come from?
- What are the tensions between all the traditional vs. modern, and local vs. cosmopolitan influences in your life?



Assessment & Evaluation

- ✓ Assess that students have honoured the Class Community Agreements during the lesson discussions and activities (*You may also invite students to do self and peer assessments)
- ✓ Observe student engagement and assess how cooperatively students are working together during the small group activities. Look for evidence of active listening, participation and cooperation.
- ✓ Assess that reflection journal responses combine previous experience and learning with frequent references to class activities and discussions
- ✓ Look for evidence in students' reflection journals that students understand:
 - the impact/influence of media on one's identity/self-image
 - the main messages from the animation, "Keep it real"
 - how cultural standards of gender identity and beauty are constructed



*You may use the following rubric scale to evaluate the above assessments: Powerful=5; Confident=4; Developing=3; Beginning=2; Not yet meeting expectations=1



Follow Up:



1. Invite students to produce creative Mind Maps that explore their complex, personal identities. Provide them with large blank pieces of paper and have them write “Who I am” in the centre of the paper as their ‘key idea’. Tell students that the questions they answered in their reflection journals will help them develop the ideas for their maps. Encourage group members to connect their common feelings through the branches or webs as they discuss their experiences about who they are, who want to be and what influences their desires.

2. Set up an account on Blogger or WordPress, and provide your students with the username, password, and URL. As a homework assignment, ask each of them to research examples of print ads or commercials from any country other than Canada or the United States. Explain to them how to access the account to share their research online with each other. Each of their blog entries should include a picture of one ad along with written commentary that addresses three main questions:

- What are their observations on international standards of beauty?
- How do these ad examples compare with the ones they presented in class?
- Were these ads surprising, or predictable? Why?

Instructions for constructing a Mind Map:

NOTE: “*The Ultimate Book of Mind Maps*” by Tony Buzan (2006) will provide some creative samples of mind mapping.

- ☆ Write down a key idea in the centre of a blank piece of paper
- ☆ Think of new ideas related to the key idea
- ☆ Using lines, colours, arrows or branches that radiate out from the centre, connect the related ideas to the key idea
- ☆ Draw quickly and write down key ideas without pausing, judging or editing
- ☆ Leave a lot of space so that you may add information over a period of time
- ☆ Personalize the map with your own symbols and designs in order to construct visual and meaningful relationships between ideas

