

Media Literacy Activity

Recommended Age: 12+

Goal

- To increase critical thinking skills and media literacy when it comes to representation and messages in mainstream media.

Have Ready

- Write: 'Media Messages' with 'What do people look like?' 'About relationships?' 'About sex?' in three parts of a flipchart.
- Optional: Find and show age-appropriate examples of unhealthy relationships in the media.

Instructions

- Ask youth to brainstorm popular types of mainstream media. Some examples are social media, music videos, reality shows, video games, news, or movies. Flipchart one or two of their favourites on the left-hand side of a flipchart paper.
- Ask youth, **"What do the people in the media look like? What are the relationships like? What messages do we get about sex?"**
- Write the themes that come out of the discussion on a flipchart.

Media Messages

What do people look like?

- Guys are 'buff' and girls are thin with big boobs. If there are fat people, they are portrayed as funny/not sexy.
- Majority of characters are white, heterosexual, and able-bodied.
- Indigenous stereotypes: e.g., gang member, Indian princess, warrior/brave, chief.

About relationships:

- Jealousy, cheating on partners, multiple sex partners, yelling, arguing, and 'drama' is seen as normal.
- Violent/abusive or over-romanticized undying love.
- Love hurts, should be super intense, "I can't live without you."
- Stalking, violence, men surrounded with multiple women who are portrayed as objects or property.
- Mainly heterosexual relationships.

About sex:

- Girls are sexual objects.
- Guys are only interested in sex.
- Sex is always rough or wild.
- No safer sex, e.g., no condoms/sex dams, no talk about STIs.
- People start kissing and then it progresses to sex without asking for consent or talking about boundaries.
- Sexual assaults on women, and specifically Indigenous women, are seen as normal.

Debrief

- We get a lot of unhealthy messages about relationships, sexuality, and what it means to be Indigenous from the media.
- With the exception of APTN, when it comes to depictions of Indigenous people, most often mainstream news coverage is

negative and mainstream media uses stereotypes or completely ignores and doesn't show Indigenous people or couples at all.

- Mainstream media also almost never shows 2SLGBQ+ people.
- The harm that comes from seeing mostly harmful stereotypes is that we might start believing what we see and forgetting positive knowledge and ways of being that we aren't seeing.
- Racism by omission happens when there are no Indigenous characters or representation. It leaves us with no healthy role models and makes it seem like Indigenous people are in the past and don't need to be concerned with modern day things.
- Media messages are rarely referred to as 'unhealthy.' In fact, they are often depicted as 'normal.' If we are being taught that it is normal to not ask for or use consent, not talk about safer sex or get tested, what are some possible problems that can happen? Some answers are: sexual assault, needs not getting met, STIs, unplanned pregnancy.
- **“What are the risks in thinking that it is normal not to have trust or respect in a relationship?”** You might expect unhealthy behaviour from your partner or use unhealthy behaviour in your relationship. You might not know that something is not okay, and therefore are less likely to get help.
- Other questions to ask youth could be, **“What are sexual relationships like in the media? Do we see people talking about safer sex? Do we see people using good examples of consent? Do the characters talk about the possibility of pregnancy or STIs and HIV/AIDS?”**
- **“What can we do to resist the harmful messages in the media?”** Be critical of what you watch, watch less TV, seek out inclusive media, look for Indigenous-created literature and art (check out APTN and NCI), challenge what we see and hear, talk to others about how the media can be damaging, educate ourselves in our culture, traditions, ceremonies and languages, find and be healthy role models, tell our own stories and remind ourselves and others that media is designed to 'entertain' and is not real life or instructions on 'how to have a healthy/happy life.'

Additional Activities

Ideally, this activity can be followed by:

- Qualities of a Healthy Relationship Brainstorm
- Fun and Single Relay Race