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**SEXUALITY
AND SOCIETY**

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SEXUALITY AND SOCIETY

Society has an enormous impact on how and what people learn about sexuality. This learning is also influenced by family and culture. In a pluralistic society like the United States, young people receive messages about sexuality from many different sources. Sometimes these messages are confusing and conflicting.

Young people benefit from analyzing both the sources and the content of these messages. They need support in learning to be respectful of the diversity of opinions that exist about sexuality issues, and they need guidance from the adults in their lives on examining the different messages they receive to help them determine their own thoughts, beliefs, and values. Learning to communicate about sexuality issues with others, to respect differing opinions, and to learn how these influences affect individual choices and decisions are important for sexual health.

The activities in this unit encourage participants to think about values and ideas about sexuality and gender and how these values and ideas may have been shaped. They also include opportunities to compare their views with others and to practice communication skills.

WHAT THE GUIDELINES SAY ABOUT SEXUALITY AND SOCIETY:

Sexuality and Society Subconcept

Society influences what people believe and how they feel about sexuality.

Middle School/Junior High School

- In the United States, people from many different cultural backgrounds have a wide range of views about sexuality.
- In a pluralistic society, the individual's right to hold different opinions is valued.
- Holding values which are different from one's family and culture is often difficult.
- American societal messages about sexuality are often confusing and contradictory.
- Messages received about sexuality from one's home and culture may be different than the general societal messages.

- In most schools, there are unwritten norms about sexuality for teenagers.
- Individuals need to examine messages received from different sources and establish guidelines for their own behavior.

High School

- Understanding the diversity of views about sexuality is important.
- Because of the wide range of sexual values and beliefs, people need to communicate their views to their friends and partners in order to negotiate behaviors that are acceptable.

Gender Roles Subconcept

Cultures teach what it is to be a man or a woman.

Elementary School

- Girls and boys and men and women are capable of doing the same jobs.
- Boys and girls can do the same chores at home.
- Both mothers and fathers have important roles as parents/
- Boys and girls have many similarities and a few differences.
- Almost all adult jobs and careers are open to men and women.
- People often expect boys and girls to behave in a certain way.

Upper Elementary School

- Believing that all boys or all girls are or should be alike is a stereotype.
- Boys and girls share equal talents, characteristics, strengths, and hopes for their future.
- Individuals have different talents, strengths, and hopes for their future.
- Boys and girls receive messages about how they should behave from their family, friends, the media, and society.
- People often expect boys and girls to behave stereotypically.

- Some families have different expectations for their boy and girl children.
- Girls and boys can be friends and respect each other.
- Sometimes girls and women receive unequal or negative treatment because they are female.
- Certain laws and rules protect women's and men's rights.

Middle School/Junior High School

- Attitudes about proper behaviors for men and women differ among families, cultures, and individuals.
- Accepting gender role stereotypes can limit a person's life.
- Young women and young men should be given the same opportunities.
- Laws protect a young woman's or young man's rights to hold jobs and be paid fairly.
- Both boys and girls can begin to show they would like to date a person.
- In some families and cultures, there is a double standard about sexual practices.

High School

- Individuals can make their own choices about appropriate roles for themselves as men and women.
- Gender role stereotypes are harmful to both men and women.
- Sexual harassment is harmful to both men and women.
- Some people are still denied equal treatment on the basis of gender even though laws prohibit this.
- Gender role stereotypes can lead to such problems as low aspirations, low paying jobs, sexual harassment, date rape, and stress-related illnesses.

Sexuality and the Media Subconcept

The media have a profound effect on sexual information, values, and behavior.

Elementary School

- Some of the material on television, in the movies, in books and magazines, on radio, and on the Internet is true and some is not.

- Some commercials try to make people and things look different and better than they really are.
- Some television programs, movies, and computer forums are not appropriate for young children.

Upper Elementary School

- People can refuse to watch, read, and/or listen to anything that offends them.
- Parents have the right to determine what is appropriate viewing material for their own children.
- No one really looks as perfect in real life as certain actors and actresses appear in the media.
- The media often present an unrealistic image of what it means to be male or female, what it means to be in love, and what parenthood and marriage are like.
- The media sometimes negatively portrays certain cultural groups.
- The media can influence the way people think and behave.
- A parent or trusted adult can help when media messages are confusing.

Middle School/Junior High School

- Media usually does not portray sexuality realistically.
- The media sometimes portrays stereotypes about the sexuality of certain cultural groups.
- The media sometimes portrays stereotypes about men and women.
- Sometimes television shows and movies provide positive models of relationships and sexuality.
- Soap operas and talk shows may give inaccurate and unrealistic information and portrayals of sexuality.
- Real relationships require more effort than is often portrayed in the media.
- Teens and adults have a responsibility to help younger children avoid or deal effectively with negative media influences.
- Communicating one's reactions to the media about the portrayal of sexual issues is important.

GENDER ROLE STEREOTYPES — WHERE DO I FIND THEM?

Adapted and reprinted with permission from John Forliti, et al, *Human Sexuality: Values & Choices*, Search Institute.

RATIONALE

By combining homework and classroom discussion, this activity is designed to provide participants with opportunities to learn about gender role stereotyping. By using examples from their own lives, gender role stereotyping can be better understood.

AUDIENCE

Junior and senior high school

TIME

- One class period (plus five minutes during an earlier class)
- Time at home to complete the activity

GOALS

To help participants:

- Define and understand gender role stereotyping and its impact on the lives of people they know
- Understand that gender role stereotyping exists in many areas of our lives
- Begin to develop strategies for reducing the negative impact of gender role stereotyping by being sensitive to it and knowing how to handle it

MATERIALS

- *Gender Role Stereotypes: Where Do I Find Them?*
Homework Sheet

PREPARATION

At the end of a class meeting, save five minutes to do the brief brainstorming activity and then give the handout and instructions as a homework assignment. Participants should have at least two nights to complete the assignment.

PROCEDURE

PART 1

1 Ask participants to brainstorm the answer to the question “What is gender role stereotyping?” Ask them to explain what it means when someone makes a sexist comment or a sexist joke. Allow several people to answer. Clarify a definition that includes the following concept:

Gender Role Stereotyping is when women and men are assumed to think, behave, or feel a certain way simply because of their gender. These assumptions are usually stereotypes and generalizations that are limiting and damaging to both women and men.

2 Explain that they will spend time looking for instances of gender role stereotyping in their daily lives. Distribute the homework sheet and explain that they will need to complete it and report their findings to the class. Have them write the definition of *gender role stereotyping* at the top of the sheet so that they can refer to it while completing the assignment. Tell them when the assignment will be due.

PART 2

1 Ask the participants to take out their homework sheets.

2 Beginning with the first question, ask several of the participants to describe what they learned from a female adult. Ask male participants to describe what they learned from females. Ask female participants to describe what they learned from males.

3 Ask several volunteers to share what they found in Question 2. Pass around magazine ads or other print material people have brought in.

4 Ask volunteers to share what they learned in Question 3.

5 Use the following questions to discuss the first three questions:

- What impact did gender role stereotyping seem to have on the adult women's lives? Did gender role stereotyping have the same or different effect on adult men's lives?
- Is gender role stereotyping diminishing or is it still strong?
- Which was easier to find: the stereotypical media portrayals or the nontraditional ones?
- Did the nontraditional roles make fun of the fact that the men or women were behaving nontraditionally, or was it taken seriously?
- How do you feel when you see gender role stereotyping on TV or in magazines? Had you noticed it before?

6 Ask participants to share some of their answers to the Question 4. Process this discussion with these questions.

- How do you feel when you hear gender biased comments at school?
- Do teachers ever reinforce gender role stereotypes?
- Are men ever gender role stereotyped? Is it less common or does it seem to be less harmful to men?
- What do you do when someone makes a gender biased comment? What do you want to do? What can you do?
- Can we think how we might reduce gender role stereotyping in our own lives?

7 Summarize by saying that gender role stereotyping affects all of us. When people's potentials are limited and their self esteem destroyed by assumptions and stereotypes, everyone loses. Men and women need to be able to work and learn in ways that treat people as individuals, respecting differences that are based on reality and not on stereotyping. When we can recognize gender role stereotyping and learn how to explain to others how harmful it is, we begin to make a difference in how men and women are treated.

GENDER ROLE STEREOTYPES: WHERE DO I FIND THEM? HOMEWORK SHEET

Instructions

Using the definition of *gender role stereotyping* discussed in class, complete these questions. You will report some of your answers and/or share some of your findings with the rest of the class.

Write down the class definition of gender role stereotyping:

1a. Ask a female adult (a parent, teacher, relative) to tell you about a time when she was treated unfairly in school or at work because she is female. Describe the situation. _____

1b. Ask a male adult (a parent, teacher, relative) to tell you about a time when he was treated unfairly in school or at work because he is male. Describe the situation. _____

2. Find examples (stories, TV shows, magazine ads) that show men doing things that are traditionally women's roles, and find examples of women filling traditional men's roles. Bring them to class or describe them here. _____

3. Describe one TV commercial or magazine ad that assumes women do housework while men have jobs outside the home. How do these assumptions show gender bias to both men and women? _____

4. Write one thing you have heard people in your school say (in the halls, in class) that you think discriminates against or "puts down" either boys or girls. _____

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF BEING FEMALE AND MALE

Adapted from a lesson by Konstance McCaffree, Ph.D.

RATIONALE

This activity helps young people explore the assumptions and misconceptions they have of the other gender and that exist about their own gender. It also promotes practice in communicating with others about gender and relationships.

AUDIENCE

Junior and senior high school

TIME

One class period

GOALS

To help participants:

- Improve communication between young men and women by increasing empathy for the other gender
- Give young men and women the opportunity to explore with each other their perceptions of their own and the other gender
- Provide participants with the opportunity to discuss how it feels to be stereotyped or mischaracterized

MATERIALS

- Markers
- Masking tape
- Large pieces of newsprint labeled ahead of time with the following:

The Advantages of Being Female

The Disadvantages of Being Female

The Advantages of Being Male

The Disadvantages of Being Male

Make duplicates of some of the headings so that there are enough for each small group to have one. (If you duplicate “The Advantages of Being Female,” for example, also duplicate “The Advantages of Being Male.”)

PROCEDURE

1 Break the group up into small single gender groups of four to five participants. Have each group elect a recorder to write the answers on newsprint. Each group will have about 10 minutes to discuss and put down responses to the heading on their newsprint (The Advantages/Disadvantages of Being Female/Male). Ideally, the premarked newsprint should be distributed to groups so that at least one group of each gender will be brainstorming about the other gender.

2 Have groups post their lists and then come together for a large group discussion. Ask members of each group to take turns reading items on their list to the large group and providing short explanations or examples of where or when something is particularly true. If it is possible, you may want to hang the lists somewhere they can remain for future reference by participants as they continue to explore their relationships with one another.

3 Process the activity with the following questions:

- How does it make you feel to see generalizations concerning your own gender?
- Is it possible for all of the things on the list to be true?
- Which items on the lists accurately describe you personally and which do not?
- Can you differentiate between examples from the lists which are “innate” (e.g. females suffering from menstrual cramps) and those which are “learned” (e.g. the results of stereotyping or assumptions)? What is true in this culture or society that may be different in other cultures or times?

- Which responses are the results of expectations or other behaviors due to stereotyping? What stereotype(s) is (are) working to produce these advantages or disadvantages?
- Which list items do people find surprising? Have you ever given thought to some of these aspects of the other gender before? Might it change some of your own attitudes to hear the difficulties and benefits of the other gender?
- Were there things that males saw as advantages that females saw as disadvantages and visa versa?
- What can people do to counter some of the things that they perceive as disadvantages for their gender?

4 Encourage participants to interact with one another. This can be achieved by having them direct questions about items on these lists that they don't understand or don't agree with toward one another. Have participants talk about how assumptions about their gender and the constraints they create, might affect them personally. Ask them to think about how the items on these lists, both accurate and not, can affect communication within a sexual or romantic relationship.

PERCEPTIONS OF SEXUALITY

By Robert Selverstone, Ph.D.

RATIONALE

This activity encourages participants to think about their own values and ideas regarding sexuality. It helps them see how these values and ideas were shaped. It also helps them to compare their values and ideas to those of others around them.

AUDIENCE

Junior and senior high school

TIME

One class period

GOALS

To help participants:

- Explore their own beliefs and values regarding sexuality
- Learn about the beliefs and values of their peers
- Consider the impact that various media sources may have in shaping their views
- Express their own values and listen to other people's views
- Think about their perceptions of other people
- Think about how they would like to be perceived by others

MATERIALS

- Large index cards
- Pens or pencils

PROCEDURE

1 Explain that the group is going to think about individual ideas and values regarding sexuality—both their own and those of others. Ask them to consider where most of their ideas and values came from as well as the factors that help shape our views about ourselves and others.

2 Give each person an index card and a pen or pencil. Tell them they do not have to put their names on the cards because you will not collect them. Give them a series of statements, and ask for their written response. They will not have to share their answers, but you will ask them to discuss several of the topics in a small group. The statements are:

1. Name someone you consider a hero/heroine or a role model of each gender.
2. Name someone you consider to be an antihero/antiheroine of each gender.
3. Name a character from the media who represents your gender as you like to see it represented. Name someone from the media who represents your gender as you do *not* like to see it represented. (Media includes books, movies, television programs, or music videos.)
4. Name a character from the media who represents love as you like to see it represented and someone from the media who represents love as you do *not* like to see it represented.
5. Name someone you consider an attractive male and someone you consider an attractive female.

Note to Teacher: If some people in the group (often males) have difficulty, tell them you want everyone to identify someone they consider attractive of each gender. Later (perhaps during processing) you can explain how homophobia can interfere with having same-sex friendships or thinking of someone of the same gender as attractive.

6. If you could become the other gender for 24 hours, what would you most like to experience? Least like to experience?
7. What would you want someone of the other gender to experience about your gender?
8. Write three words that you would like females to use to describe you, and three words that you would like males to use to describe you.
(5 minutes)

③ After participants have responded to all of the questions, divide them into pairs. Depending on how well they know one another, you may want to ask them to find a partner that they do not know well. Tell each to pick one topic from her or his list to discuss with the partner. Each will have 1 ½ minutes to talk and 1 ½ minutes to listen. Partners do not have to discuss the same topic.

Rules for discussion groups:

1. Only one person talks.
2. The listener's responsibilities are:
 - a. to listen
 - b. to accept what the other person says
 - c. to encourage discussion by asking questions.

④ After each member has had a chance to talk, process the activity with these questions:

- How comfortable (uncomfortable) was this exercise? Why?
- What was the easiest (safest) part? Why?
- What was it like to pick a partner? Was the person's gender a factor?
- Does anyone want to share discussions you had as a pair?

⑤ Tell the group you are now going to form groups of threes. Ask participants to say "Thank You" and "Good-bye" to their partners. Then have them form trios.

⑥ Again, each person will have 12 minutes to talk. Tell each to pick a new topic. One person will talk, the other two will listen. Each will have the opportunity to talk.

⑦ After each member of the trios has talked, process:

- How was the trio different?

Let's look at some of your initial answers apart from the small group discussions:

- What is *attractive*? What makes a person attractive?
- What gender differences did you notice in descriptions of an attractive male and an attractive female?
- You picked something you wanted a person of the opposite gender to experience about your gender. Did you pick something because it was special? Painful? Both?
- Think of the three words you would like females to use and the three words you would like males to use to describe you. Were they different? The same? What does this say about how you want people to perceive you?
- Was anyone surprised by her or his own answers?

LINDA AND LARRY: COMMUNICATING MESSAGES AND ASSUMPTIONS

By Jay Friedman and Nancy Abbey

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RATIONALE

Clear communication is a critical factor in making healthy decisions about sexuality and carrying them out. When we are misinterpreted, we are at risk. This activity is designed to help participants understand how good communication about sexual thoughts, needs, and feelings is necessary in relationships.

AUDIENCE

Senior high school

TIME

One class period

GOALS

To help participants to:

- Understand the importance of clear communication in a loving relationship
- Be able to determine that “no” means “no” and “yes” means “yes,” and to always make this assumption
- Develop awareness of how one’s actions may send messages that one may not intend to send
- Identify any form of forced or coerced sexual activity—male or female—as sexual assault

MATERIALS

- *Larry’s Story Worksheet* (enough for half of the class)
- *Linda’s Story Worksheet* (enough for half of the class)

PROCEDURE

1 Ask students if they’ve heard that in some cultures a guest is expected to belch after dinner to show appreciation of fine food. Many people in our culture would consider this an insult. Remind them that people of different cultures often think a behavior means something it’s not intended to convey. Explain that sometimes

there are real cultural differences between two people in a relationship. A lot of misunderstandings start when one person takes something the wrong way. It’s called poor communication. Tell students that today they will read a story about two poor communicators.

2 Divide the class into groups of four to five people. Distribute *Larry’s Story Worksheet* to half of the group, and *Linda’s Story Worksheet* to the other half. Allow students time to read the story and answer the questions in the box. (This can be done individually, in pairs, or in small groups if students have trouble reading.) Clarify any questions they may have about the worksheets. Explain that they are to share their understanding of what happened in their group. Allow 10 to 15 minutes for discussion.

3 With students still in their small groups, read Linda’s story and have the groups with her story share their responses to the first two questions. Repeat with Larry’s story. Stress that neither Linda nor Larry communicated in a way that could overcome the myths and stereotypes they had about each other.

4 Provide categories students can use to analyze the confused messages between Linda and Larry. For example:

- *Mixed Messages*: A mixed message is one where words and actions seem to contradict each other; e.g., Linda’s dress seemed to indicate to Larry she wanted to have intercourse, but Linda just wanted to look attractive.
- *Missed Messages*: A missed message is one that is so vaguely stated that the other person doesn’t catch it; e.g., Larry thought he had let Linda know he had sex on his mind.

- *Assumptions:* People often believe or assume that something is true without confirmation; e.g., Linda expected a “perfect gentleman” to know she didn’t want to have intercourse. Larry assumed that a low-cut dress sent a message of receptivity to intercourse and that women resist intercourse but want to be talked into it.

Lead a discussion using the following questions:

- What mixed messages were sent by Larry or Linda?
- What are the missed messages?
- What are the assumptions made by Larry or Linda?
- What could Larry and/or Linda have done to avoid this outcome?

- 5 Suggest that students be alert in the next few days to assumptions and confusing messages in their interactions with friends and family. Remind students of the points they came up with at the end of the lesson. Reinforce the importance of taking “no”—even a weak “no”—as a “no” in a sexual situation.

LINDA'S STORY WORKSHEET

I'll never forget that night as long as I live. Larry and I had been dating for a while and he had acted like a perfect gentleman. Well, we had done our share of kissing, but he never gave me any reason not to trust him.

The night of the party I wore this gorgeous dress that I'd borrowed from my roommate. It was a little flashier than I normally wear but I thought it was very flattering. I really wanted to dance, but it had always been hard to talk Larry into it.

At the party, I had some beer—my cup always seemed to be full—and it made me really tired. Strangely, Larry wanted to dance, but I was so tipsy that I could barely hold on to him to keep from falling. Maybe I shouldn't have suggested that we both lie down together, but I needed to rest, and it felt weird to just go upstairs by myself and leave Larry all alone.

I was groggy and felt like I was falling in and out of sleep. The next thing I remember, Larry was all over me, forcing me to have intercourse with him. I didn't want to scream and make a fool of myself. Anyway, the party was loud and I doubt anyone would have heard me. At first, I tried to fight him off, but I was too wiped out to really do anything. Besides, it was fast and he said something about showing our love. I'm so confused. He seemed like such a nice guy, and now he's left a message on my machine about a party this weekend.

What's going on?

1. What did Linda want when she suggested they lie down together? _____

2. Why did she feel she would be safe with Larry? _____

3. Why is Linda confused now? _____

LARRY'S STORY WORKSHEET

I still don't understand what happened. Linda and I had been dating for a long time and, while we hadn't slept together yet, I told her I was attracted to her and gave her lots of signs that I eventually wanted to go to bed with her. We were supposed to go to a party, and when she showed up in this sexy, low-cut dress, I thought this was her way of saying she was ready.

At the party, we drank some beer, which made her sort of sleepy and sensual. While I don't normally dance, I was really feeling good that night. I was surprised, but loved the way she held her body close to mine when we danced. And then when she suggested that we find a place to lie down, what was I supposed to think? Of course, I thought she wanted some privacy to finally have a chance to make love.

Granted, she did grumble a bit when I started to undress her, but I figured she just wanted to be persuaded. Lots of girls feel a little funny about being forward and want the guy to get them off the hook.

I don't know. We had intercourse and it was fine—I even told her that it was the ultimate expression of our love. I took her home from the party and I thought everything was okay. But I haven't heard from her since, and she hasn't returned my call inviting her to this weekend's party.

What's going on?

1. What happened that led Larry to believe Linda wanted to have intercourse? _____

2. Why did Larry have intercourse with Linda even though she "grumbled"? _____

3. Why is he confused? _____

MEDIA MESSAGES: A LESSON WITH PARENTS

By Elizabeth M. Casparian, Ph.D., and Eva S. Goldfarb, Ph.D.

RATIONALE

This activity gives young people and their parents/guardians the opportunity to evaluate media messages about sexuality and share how they feel about the messages. The activity also encourages young people and their parents/guardians to be more critical media consumers.

AUDIENCE

Junior and senior high school

TIME

- 20 minutes class time
- 30 minutes to two hours at home

GOALS

To help participants:

- Develop an understanding of how media messages influence beliefs and feelings about sexuality
- Become more critical of the media and find more positive ways to experience media

MATERIALS

- *Media Messages Worksheet*
- Access to media (e.g. television, movies, music, art, magazines)
- *Declaration of Completion*

PROCEDURE

1 Explain that television, movies, music, art, magazines, newspapers, and other forms of media often send messages about sexuality. Sometimes these messages are educational and beneficial. Other times they are hurtful, incorrect, exploitive, or negative. Parents/guardians don't always feel good about the messages their children receive from the media. This exercise is designed to help parents/guardians and children share time together experiencing media and evaluating messages.

2 Hand out the *Media Messages Worksheet* and explain it to participants. Over the next week, students must select two to four media presentations and experience them with a parent, guardian, or other trusted adult. These could include TV, movies, music videos, art, magazines, or stories. One or both parents/guardians and their child must experience the media together and then complete the worksheet. After they complete the worksheets, they should share their responses with each other. After completing two to four examples, the parent/guardian and child need to work together to write a plan for positive and useful media use.

Note: Some young people may be unable to complete this assignment with their parent(s) or guardian(s). Allow them the opportunity to complete the assignment with another trusted adult such as an aunt, uncle, sports coach, or member of the clergy.

3 After completing the worksheets, participants should bring them into class. Collect the *Declaration of Completion*. Discuss the homework by asking these questions:

- How did you select the media events to evaluate?
- Had you ever experienced that event with a parent/guardian before? What was it like?
- Which were easier to write down, the positive or the negative messages? Why?
- What plans did you develop to become a more critical media consumer?

MEDIA MESSAGES WORKSHEET

Instructions

Select a TV program, movie, music video, song, art, magazine, or newspaper article and experience it together. Each of you should select at least one. After you complete the event, fill out the worksheet individually. After you have completed questions 1 and 2, share your answers with each other. Then complete question 3 together. Complete one sheet for each of your two to four media events.

Type and Title of Media Event: _____

Date and Time: _____

Place and Persons Experiencing the Event: _____

1. Write down three messages from this media event, particularly those that relate to sexuality, gender issues, family communication, and/or sexual health **that you consider positive or reflective of your values.** _____

2. Write down three messages from this media event, particularly those that relate to sexuality, gender issues, family communication, and/or sexual health **that you consider negative or not reflective of your values.** _____

3. Work together to develop a plan to constructively criticize the media and to use it in a positive way. Write the plan below: _____

DECLARATION OF COMPLETION

We, the undersigned, completed the
Media Messages: A Lesson with Parents
homework assignment.

Signed:

Participant

Parent/Guardian

Parent/Guardian

Date