

Lesson Plan: Beauty is Skin Deep
(based on content from GLSEN)

Grade/subject(s): PHE 6/7

Big Ideas: Learning about similarities and differences in individuals and groups influences community health

Competencies:

- Describe and assess strategies for responding to discrimination, stereotyping, and bullying
- Explore the impact of transition and change on identities

Content:

- Influences on individual identity, including sexual identity, gender, values, and beliefs
- Influences of physical, emotional, and social changes on identities and relationships

Core Competencies:

- Communication – Acquire, interpret and present information (includes inquiries)
- Creative Thinking – Developing ideas
- Critical Thinking – Analyze and critique
- Personal and Cultural Identity – Personal values and choices
- Personal Awareness and Responsibility – Self-determination
- Social Responsibility – Valuing Diversity

First Peoples Principles of Learning:

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity

Rationale

Students will reflect on the ways in which they have experienced or participated in name-calling based on physical appearance, and the ways in which expectations about appearance in our society influence us. They will learn about media literacy and examine media images for “attractiveness messages” that consciously and unconsciously influence our attitudes and behavior toward others.

Teaching Strategies and Questions

Post the following questions on the board or read them aloud. Ask students to silently reflect on them:

- Have you ever been on the receiving end of a cruel comment about your physical appearance?
- Have others let you know, in some way, that you're not good looking enough?
- Do you find clothes shopping unpleasant because of fears about how others will judge you?
- Have you ever skipped an activity to avoid comments about your appearance?
- Do you think often about dieting because of comments about your weight?
- Have you considered changing your hair or other aspects of your appearance to look better to others?
- Have you ever made cruel comments to others about their appearance?

Point out that, unfortunately, most of us would answer yes to at least one of the questions above. Ask students why they think it is that we are so quick to judge others by their appearance and without getting to know them. Challenge students to articulate how we get our ideas about what others are “supposed” to look like in our society.

If it has not already come up, point out to students that one way in which we get our ideas about what is attractive is through the media. Share the following statistics with the group:

- A study of over 4,000 television commercials revealed that 1 out of every 3 to 4 commercials sends some sort of “attractiveness message,” telling viewers what is or is not attractive. The average teenager sees over 5,000 “attractiveness messages” each year.

- One study found that teens who watch soaps and TV shows that emphasize the ideal body type report a higher sense of body dissatisfaction than other teens. This was also true for girls who watched music videos
- Another study found that identification with television stars (for girls and boys), models (for girls) and athletes (for boys), is related to their unhappiness with their bodies.
- In a study of fifth graders, 10-year-old girls and boys told researchers they were unhappy with their own bodies after watching a music video by Britney Spears or a clip from the TV show, Friends
- A psychological study in 1995 found that three minutes spent looking at models in a fashion magazine caused 70% of women to feel depressed, guilty and shameful
- Ask students to respond to these statistics and to comment on the extent to which they think they are affected by “attractiveness messages” they receive on a daily basis.

Tell students that one way to resist some of the media’s false messages about appearance—and their effect on our self-esteem and behavior toward others—is to become media literate. This means thinking about the values behind media images, raising critical questions about them, and being aware of who created them and for what purpose. Tell students that they will be practicing media literacy by selecting up to three media representations to study (in class or as homework). Students can select magazines, websites, TV shows or commercials, movies or music videos that are popular with their peers. Give each student a copy of the chart, Media Investigation: Physical Appearance and Attractiveness, which they can use to take notes as they research.

For each item that they study, have students write and discuss their answers to one or more of the following questions:

1. Who created the magazine (or show, video, movie, etc.) and for what purpose?
2. How many and what type of “attractiveness messages” were communicated? (These can be verbal, types of people or characters, gestures or expressions, types of clothing, etc.)
3. Do these messages reflect real life and real people in your community?
4. What are the values or beliefs behind these messages? Do you agree with them?
5. What techniques are being used to get you to buy into the messages?
6. How might these messages affect your own or others’ attitudes about physical appearance?
7. What important images or messages have been left out?

Suggest to students that expressions like “beauty is only skin deep” and “don’t judge a book by its cover” seem to be empty clichés in our culture today. Ask them if they agree and whether or not they believe that most people reflect such values in their behavior toward others. Challenge students to think about concrete ways that they can change the culture in their own class or school around this issue. Ask what can they do to get beyond appearance as a dominant force in the way they relate to one another. List their ideas on a sheet of chart paper so that they can be discussed and followed up on at a later time.

Possible Extensions

- Tell students that girls around the country are putting this way of thinking to action each year on Turn Beauty Inside Out Day, which encourages people to submit essays about girls in their lives who are beautiful inside and out (see <http://www.newmoon.org>). The handout, Turn Beauty Inside Out Day Winning Essays, includes some of the 2003 entries, which you can share with your students
- Ask students to write an essay about someone “beautiful” in their lives (emphasize that it doesn’t have to be a girl). When students have completed their essays, ask for a few volunteers to share their pieces with the class and to receive feedback from their peers
 - Extend this activity by revisiting the ideas brainstormed earlier about ways to get beyond appearance, and by making plans to put one or more of these ideas into action.

Assessment

- Students will be able to explain how conscious and unconscious expectations regarding appearance impact us in negative ways
- Students will be able to think critically about “attractiveness messages” in the media

- Students will be able to identify specific actions they can take to move beyond appearance as a dominant force in their social lives

Book Titles

- Brashich, Audrey. *All Made Up: A Girl's Guide to Seeing Through Celebrity Hype and Seeing Real Beauty*. 2006. 160p. Walker Children's, \$6.50 (978-0802777447) Gr 6-12
 - An in-depth, informative, and eye-opening look at the effect the media and pop culture has on young women's self images
- Rissman, Rebecca. *Asking Questions About Body Image in Advertising*. 2015. 32p. Cherry Lake Publishing, \$18.25 (978-1633624863) Gr 4-8
 - Helps readers discern the messages, both overt and implied, that tell consumers to change the way they look to help them change the way they feel
- Douglas, Anne and Douglas, Julie. *Body Talk: The Straight Facts on Fitness, Nutrition & Feeling Great About Yourself*. 2006. 64p. Maple Tree, \$6.50 (978-1897066614) Gr 4-8
 - Award-winning author Ann Douglas and her daughter Julie provide girls with funny, frank information on eating disorders, fad diets and more

Full lesson plan is available from GLSEN.