 What if?

Duration: 45 minutes

This activity has been adapted from the activities “Finish the story, my porn regret” and “Is there such as thing as good porn?” from the resource Ollis, D, Harrison, L & Maharaj, C, 2013, Sexuality Education Matters: Preparing pre-service teachers to teach sexuality education, Deakin University, Burwood, Vi.

Purpose of the task

With the increase in mobile technology, young people are likely to be exposed to explicit material or pornography. Exposure may be accidental or deliberate. Explicit material can shape social and sexual interactions and expectations. A young person’s capacity to critique the messages in explicit material does not automatically equip them with the skills to make choices to reject the negative influence of explicit material.

This activity is designed to build on knowledge and understandings developed in previous activities on respectful relationships, pornography, gender, power and consent, and present multiple subject positions around pornography.

Course outcomes

3.2 Analyse the positive and negative implications of technology and digital media on self-concept, independence, relationships and health behaviours.

5.1 Critically analyse situations, attitudes and behaviours that influence independence, health, safety and wellbeing in different contexts.

5.2 Recognise and respond appropriately to situations which may be limiting or harmful to self and others.

6.2 Demonstrate behaviours that model positive values, beliefs and attitudes and promote inclusion and equity for self and others.

What do we want students to know, understand or be able to do?

* Examine ethical decision-making and sex positive messages.
* Recognise the ways images are interpreted and determine their own position on these images based on values and beliefs.
* Reflect on how portrayals in explicit imagery and media differ from personal values and beliefs.
* Make respectful decisions regarding relationships and sexual behaviour.

Required resources and materials for preparation

Student activities are set around:

* small group
* individual activities
* offline
* online

Equipment required:

* “Finish the story” sheets – copies per group or individual

Suggested content

| Learning context | Content |
| --- | --- |
| Independence  Focus: Building self-concepts and independence | Personal values and beliefs   * influences on values and beliefs, e.g. technology, social and cultural norms, media, family, relationships * influence of values, attitudes and beliefs on decisions and actions in various contexts |
| Relationships  Focus: Promoting safety, equality and respect in relationships | Valuing and advocating for the rights of self and others   * changing perspectives and challenging stereotypes * respecting others   Power and influence in relationships   * power in relationships, e.g. positive use of power, situational power * expectations of partners and others * different values and beliefs |
| Sexuality and sexual health  Focus: Safe and ethical behaviour | Safe and ethical behaviour   * respect for self and others * standards of behaviour   Influences on behaviour   * values and beliefs, e.g. culture, social pressures, double standards * explicit imagery, e.g., sharing, distribution, challenging norms * critical media literacy, e.g. challenging perspectives, stereotypes and media portrayals * technology and media, e.g. sharing information and images, online communities * policy and law, e.g. codes of conduct, online terms of agreement, confidentiality, consent, discrimination, harassment |

Teaching notes

Given the contentious and often personal nature of this content, it is important that teachers take time to reflect on their own position and any associated concerns, fears or reactions they may have. In order to teach sexuality education effectively, it is essential that facilitators also explore their own personal positioning and the implications this has for their teaching. More information and research can be found at:

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria - [Eroticising inequality: technology, pornography and young people](http://www.dvrcv.org.au/knowledge-centre/our-blog/eroticising-inequality-technology-pornography-and-young-people), Crabbe, M. & Corlett, D.

Creating a safe and supportive learning environment

There are a number of strategies that can be used to create a supportive learning environment which enables students to feel safe to learn and ask questions. They include:

* making students aware at the beginning of Life Ready sessions that disclosing personal information that indicates they may be at risk of harm will be reported to the school principal in all instances. This includes personal disclosures related to instances of abuse, drug use, neglect or sexual activity under the legal age of consent.
* being aware that some parts of Life Ready can be confronting and sensitive for some students.
* enabling students to withdraw if they find issues personally confronting to protect them from making harmful disclosures. Equally, it is important to be prepared for issues that arise as a result of a student making a public disclosure in the classroom.

More information on creating a safe and supportive learning environment can be found on the [Life Ready website](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/pdhpe/life-ready).

Evaluating resources before use

Preview and evaluate all strategies, resources and teaching and learning approaches in full before use with students to determine suitability for student learning needs, stage of development and local school context. Consider the age, maturity, cultural background, sexuality, gender, sex, health and other characteristics of students in your care. Apply professional judgements to all strategies, teaching and learning approaches and resources including audio visual materials (e.g. videos, media clips and YouTube), interactive web-based content (e.g. games, quizzes and websites) and texts.

Use the [resource review flowchart](https://schoolsequella.det.nsw.edu.au/file/083acd3a-daca-4307-9afe-bc6c888f694a/1/final-resource-flowchart-html5.zip/index.html) to decide about the suitability of teaching and learning resources.

Materials should be reviewed in full and endorsed by the school principal before use in NSW government schools.

Communication with parents and caregivers

Some aspects of Life Ready may be viewed as sensitive or controversial, such as learning about abuse, child protection, drugs, respectful relationships, sexual health, sexuality and violence. Inform parents and carers, prior to the occasion, of the specific details of the Life Ready program, so that parents and caregivers have time to exercise their rights of withdrawing their child from a particular session. In this regard, a parents or caregiver’s wish must be respected.

Establishing how parents and caregivers will be informed about programs and involved in consultation is a school-based decision. Where parents and caregivers indicate they wish to withdraw their child from a program it is useful to negotiate which parts of the Life Ready program they are concerned about. A sample information letter is available on the [Life Ready website.](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/pdhpe/life-ready)

Activity one – Finish the story (20-25 minutes)

* Students work in small groups with a copy of one of the three “Finish the story” scenarios.
* Students read the scenario in their group and discuss possible endings to the story. In groups students answer the questions provided.
* Facilitate a whole group discussion inviting each group to read their scenario, describe the benefits and risks of the possible endings to the story and report on the group’s discussions.
  + Allow different groups with the same story to contribute responses to different questions.
* Students work in small groups to discuss the following questions for the scenarios:
  + are the scenarios realistic for young people you know?
  + which options do you think the characters would choose? Give reasons for your choice.
  + what assumptions about males or females are being made in the chosen endings?
  + who has the power in this scenario? How does this power impact on the endings?
  + how easy would it be for the characters to make choices other than what their partner, peers or cultural context expects?
  + how might young people feel if they don’t feel free to make their own choices?
* As a whole group, propose ways to make it easier for the character to freely choose what they would like to do, e.g. positive sense of self, supportive friends, being willing to lose the relationship to stand up for what they want.

Debrief and pulling it together

* It is important to debrief and bring the discussion together to highlight many of the unrealistic and harmful messages that can be conveyed through media and explicit imagery and to emphasise the ways in which these differ from respectful, pleasurable sexuality. Discussing the role of gender and power in situations like this are important.
* In your discussion, emphasise the following messages:
  + it is difficult to voice an objection that sits outside gendered norms and expectations.
  + different people might be comfortable with different responses, yet can still use their personal power. For example, if Jack didn’t want to challenge his friends but didn’t want to watch porn, he could say he didn’t feel well and go home.
  + it is appropriate for people to respond in a way that works best for them.

Teacher fact sheet

Explicit material (pornography) enjoys unprecedented legitimacy around the world. The mainstreaming of explicit material can be demonstrated in part by the sheer scale of the commercial industry. About a quarter of Australian adults are estimated to be consumers of explicit material (Richters et al. 2003). Equipped with the most recent technology, young people also are explicit material consumers.

As is the case among adults, there is a significant gender divide in young people’s consumption of explicit material. Young men are more likely than their female peers to:

* use explicit material for sexual excitement and for masturbation
* to use it alone and in same-sex groups
* to view a wider range of images
* to initiate its use, rather than be introduced to it by an intimate partner. (Flood, 2010)

Impact of technology

Technology enables easy access to the multitude of free explicit images available online. Significantly, this can be done anonymously. Explicit material is marketed aggressively on the Internet. Explicit pop-ups can appear uninvited on the screen, children’s games can turn into explicit images and a simple misspelling into a search engine can provide links to an array of unexpected images and materials. This means that it is not only those young people who intentionally seek out sexually explicit material that consume pornography; 84 per cent of boys and 60 per cent of girls report having been exposed accidently to internet sex sites (Flood & Hamilton, 2003).

Social norms

Access to explicit material is only part of the story of the mainstreaming of pornography. The pornography industry has had an incredible influence on popular culture. This is evident in the billboards, music videos and designer stores that shape the desires and imaginations of a younger and younger demographic.

It is not just that culture has become more sexualised. There are certain insignia that are now commonplace within mainstream explicit imagery culture, such as the use of labels and messages on clothing and other products, which are associated with explicit imagery, e.g. Playboy bunnies.

Messages on gender and sexuality

Pornographic portrayals of gender and sex often are not realistic. Many of pornography’s messages about gender and sex can be harmful and are in conflict with a sexuality that is respectful and pleasurable. These include messages about:

* body image
* sexual health
* sexual pleasure
* sexual consent
* particular sex acts
* gender stereotypes
* male sexual aggression
* female sexual availability and subservience.

Explicit material, as a visual (mis)representation of sexuality, distorts an individual’s concept of sexual relations by objectifying them, which, in turn, alters both sexual attitudes and behaviour. There are concerns that exposure to explicit material significantly distorts attitudes and perceptions about the nature of sexual intercourse. Explicit material often encourages consumers to view women as “sex objects,” commodities or instruments for their pleasure, not as a person with her own inherent dignity.

These messages must be addressed to ensure young people develop sexual relationships that demonstrate mutual respect, consent and pleasure.

Finish the story scenarios

Source: Ollis, D, Harrison, L & Maharaj, C, 2013, Sexuality Education Matters: Preparing pre-service teachers to teach sexuality education, Deakin

Jack

Jack and several of his friends were invited to Rani’s house for the afternoon on Saturday. Not long after he arrived Jack noticed that Rani was putting on a pornographic DVD. Most of the others there laughed and cheered as Rani put it on and settled in to watch it. Jack felt uncomfortable as his friends laughed at what was being done to the women.

Jack didn’t find it funny at all. To Jack it looked painful and awful and although he could feel himself getting aroused, it’s not what he wanted to find sexy. Jack didn’t want his sexual imagination to be shaped by the kinds of things portrayed in porn.

Finish the story

Option A: Jack stays at Rani’s house

Option B: Jack leaves Rani’s house

Questions:

1. discuss what each of these options could look like? What kinds of things might Jack do or say in each scenario? Write your own ending to the story for each option.
2. what would be the risks and benefits for each of the endings you describe?

Raj

Raj is asked by her partner to send a sexual image. Her partner tells Raj that the sexy picture would not be shared. Raj doesn’t like this idea and tells her partner she doesn’t want to, but her partner is persistent, asking her often and saying how much it would mean to their relationship. Raj’s partner tells her other girls do it and it’s no big deal. Her partner suggests that if she was in love like she says she is, then she wouldn’t hesitate and would see it as a compliment.

Finish the story

Option A: Raj sends her partner a picture

Option B: Raj doesn’t send her partner a picture

Questions:

1. discuss what each of these options could look like. What kinds of things might Raj and her partner do or say in each scenario? Write your own ending to the story for each option.
2. what would be the risks and benefits for each of the endings you describe?

Sam

Sam’s partner wants to try the type of sex that is common in explicit material and pornography. To Sam, this sex looks like it would be painful, and certainly not enjoyable. Sam thinks sex should be pleasurable for both partners and doesn’t want to try this kind of sex. Sam’s partner asks often, regularly showing Sam more explicit material, and encouraging Sam to ‘loosen up’ about it.

Finish the story

Option A: Sam does the kind of sex shown in the explicit material

Option B: Sam doesn’t do the type of sex shown in the explicit material

Questions:

1. discuss what each of these options could look like. What kinds of things might Sam and Sam’s partner do or say in each scenario? Write your own ending to the story for each option.
2. what would be the risks and benefits for each of the endings you describe?