

Sexual Agency: Represent!

A Lesson Plan from Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Curriculum

Fostering responsibility by respecting young people's rights to honest sexuality education.

NSES ALIGNMENT:

SH.12.INF.5 - Analyze ways systemic oppression and intersectionality impact the sexual agency of communities of color and other marginalized communities

TARGET GRADE: High School

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Newsprint (along with markers)
- Pre-prepped newsprint:
 - one that says, "Sexual Agency" and its definition
 - one that says, "Sexual Agency"
 - one that says, "Systemic Oppression" and its definition
 - one that says, "Systemic Oppression"
 - one that says, "Intersectionality" and its definition

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Define intersectionality [Knowledge]
2. Examine at least two examples where one's sexual agency is impacted by oppression with a focus on intersectionality [Knowledge]
3. Generate at least one action people can take to support system-impacted communities in and outside of school [Knowledge]

LESSON RATIONALE:

Sexual agency is the ability to identify, communicate, and negotiate one's sexual needs, and to initiate behaviors that allow for the satisfaction of those needs. It aids in the development of their own sexual identities and practices. Sexual agency is multidimensional in that discussions have included sexual assertiveness, feelings of entitlement to pleasure, and sexual satisfaction.

Quality comprehensive sexuality education has an opportunity to not only inform young people about their bodies and their own sexual and reproductive wellness, but it can also aid in fostering positive values around healthy relationships, human rights, and equity. This lesson will discuss values and stereotypes that have been generalized by dominant culture while unlearning/relearning ideas that are less harmful to those that are oppressed, such as communities of color and those with several system-impacted identities.

ADVANCED PREPARATION:

- It is in your best interest to do additional research outside of this activity. Please see the resource material attached to the lesson. Even if you are well versed in racial justice, you understand the importance of keeping current with examples and shifting language; we have an amazing responsibility!
- Repost group agreements or class ground rules.
- While this lesson is beneficial, it is important to infuse discussions of race and racial justice within daily instruction.
- This lesson may bring up opportunities to address bias and stereotypes, particularly around the commodification and hypersexualization of people of color. A few resources:

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- [Ain't Nobody Got Time for That: Anti-Black Girl Violence in the Era of #SayHerName](#)
- [Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood](#)
- [Hollywood Played a Role in Hypersexualizing Asian Women](#)
- Although this is a stand-alone lesson, planning context behind placement would provide opportunities to weave in previously covered topics; it could also help with time management. That way, conversations can focus on understanding intersectionality and systemic oppression rather than clarifying sexuality-specific content.

PROCEDURE:

STEP 1:

Start by letting the students know that today's lesson is going to be about sexual agency and oppression. Say, **"These topics can be challenging or can make us feel a variety of emotions so we're going to set the stage, remind ourselves of our group agreements (or 'how we treat each other' if agreements are not used), and how important it is to also take care of yourself."**

Note to the Teacher: Reminder to use trauma-informed strategies in the classroom. For example, informing the students of potential activating or triggering content. Below are a few resources:

- Cardea's [Guide to Trauma-Informed Sex Education \(PDF\)](#)
- Advocate For Youth's [Trauma Informed Approaches When Teaching Sex Education \(YouTube\)](#)

This is also a perfect opportunity for you to reinforce that our culture, backgrounds, community, etc. inform the way we live our lives - race and sexuality included (revisiting the Circles of Sexuality - <https://www.advocatesforyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/storage/advfy/documents/circles.pdf> - may also be helpful).

Let your students know if you will be taking questions throughout or waiting until an allotted Q&A time (and set a time for that). (5 minutes)

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STEP 2:

Say, “Before we can discuss sexual agency and oppression, let’s define sexual agency.” Display the pre-prepped newsprint with the words “Sexual Agency” and its definition (provided below).

Sexual Agency

- ability to identify, communicate, and negotiate one’s sexual needs
- ability to initiate behaviors that allow for the satisfaction of those needs
- aids in the development of their own sexual identities and practices
- sexual assertiveness
- feelings of entitlement to pleasure
- sexual satisfaction

Note to the Teacher: If sexual agency has been defined in a previous class, this is a great opportunity to have the participants define it based on past conversations. Use newsprint to document their responses and then include what wasn’t mentioned from above.

To assure there’s a general understanding, use the piece of newsprint labeled, “Sexual Agency” to have the class share examples of what sexual agency would look like. Below are some examples to include:

- freedom to determine your sexual identity
- freedom to express your gender
- freedom in your gender identity
- freedom to make decisions about your sexual health
- freedom to enjoy and celebrate your body
- freedom to engage in sexual behaviors with consent and without coercion or exploitation
- freedom to choose whether or not to engage in sexual behaviors
- freedom to stop or refuse any sexual activities
- healthy relationships
- being able to communicate your sexual needs
- freedom to experience pleasure
- healthy negotiation between partners
- policies and procedures that affirm sexual autonomy around sexual and reproductive wellness
- healthy families
- healthy communities
- live without fear of abuse and harm

(10 minutes)

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STEP 3:

Say, “**We all deserve the right to determine our sexual agency. We are all capable of making and enforcing decisions about bodies and sexuality. However, there are systems put in place that cause barriers to our ability to make those decisions. They predominantly affect communities of color, Black people in particular.**” Display the pre-prepped newsprint with the words “Systemic Oppression” and its definition (provided below).

Systemic Oppression

- Intentional disadvantaging of groups of people based on their identity while advantaging members of the dominant group (race, gender, sexual orientation, language, size, ability, etc.)

Note to the Teacher: Additional clarifying information and resources below.

System

- *set of parts that together make a whole*
- *established way of doing with the assumption that it's “the normal way”*
- *longstanding and runs on its own*

Oppression

- *systematic subjugation of one social group by a more powerful social group for social, economic, and political benefit*
- *oppressor is able to define reality for themselves*
- *oppressed may begin to internalized negative beliefs and assumed roles*

(Source : Racism Defined - dRworksBook)

Also, check out Lens of Systemic Oppression — [National Equity Project](#)

Ensure both pieces of newsprint (“Sexual Agency” and “Systemic Oppression”) are in proximity. Ask, “**Considering what’ve we talked about - sexual agency - can you think of some ways oppression can show up with regards to sexual agency?**”

Note to the Teacher: If oppressed identities have not been addressed in class yet, this is an opportunity to ensure participants are familiar. Some examples include:

Oppressed: *Black, brown, people of color, trans, nonbinary, queer, disabled, lower SES, fat, over 65, non-Abrahamic religions/spiritualities, English language learners, undocumented, feminine, no higher education, dark-skinned, kinky hair*

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Use the piece of newsprint labeled, “*Systemic Oppression*” to have the class share examples of what obstacles to sexual agency would look like. Refer to the collection of responses for “*Sexual Agency*.” Have the participants determine what roadblocks could exist for communities of color as well as other oppressed identities. Below are some examples to include:

- sexual health clinics lacking accessibility, paperwork in multiple languages, translators, general resources in comparison to more affluent areas
- targeted genocide, harm, abuse, assault, based on oppressed identities
- sex education focused on “risk” and illness and leaving out pleasure
- sex education leaving out oppressed identities, including sexual and gender identity
- schools, etc. not having gender-neutral restrooms
- stereotypes and discrimination impacting care, relationship dynamics, and/or self-image (i.e. shaming teen parents)

Say, “**As you can see, barriers created by systemic oppression can come with a variety of challenges, especially when discussing multiple oppressed identities.**”

(10 minutes)

STEP 4:

Display the pre-prepped newsprint with the word “Intersectionality” and its definition (provided below).

Intersectionality

- The complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups - Merriam-Webster

Note to the Teacher: Concepts to mention in explanation are -

- *coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, Black Legal Scholar and Civil Rights Advocate*
- *created initially to highlight the specific oppression experienced by Black women, living at the intersections of at least sexism (different by that experienced by white women) and racism (different by that experienced by Black men)*
- *we have individual identities that intersect in ways that impact how we are viewed, understood, and treated*

Sexual Orientation Facts and Info:

Finding and Assessing Credible Sources Online

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- *Useful quotes:*
 - *“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.” — Audre Lorde, Zami*
 - *“. . . the study of overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination. The theory suggests that—and seeks to examine how—various biological, social, and cultural categories such as gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, religion, caste, age, and other axes of identity interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels. The theory proposes that we should think of each element or trait of a person as inextricably linked with all of the other elements in order to fully understand one’s identity.” - Sonya Renee Taylor explaining Intersectionality, The Body is Not an Apology*

Additional resources to discuss Intersectionality:

- [***Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics***](#)
by Kimberlé Crenshaw
- [***Kimberlé Crenshaw: The urgency of intersectionality***](#)
- [***Intersectionality, explained: meet Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term***](#)
- [***Amaze’s Intersectionality Video***](#)

Say, **“It is necessary for us to understand that sexual agency, what we’ve agreed to as a right, has been positioned as a privilege. For sexual agency to be a right for all, we need to center communities of color and acknowledge issues will look different for everyone, especially with those who live at the intersection of multiple oppressions. Next, I want you to showcase your understanding!”** (5 minutes)

STEP 5:

Place students into groups of 3 or 4 and distribute the *Sexual Agency: Represent(ation)!* worksheet. The groups are going to come up with a character or celebrity of color that they agree embodies sexual agency. They are to discuss the following:

- What makes them think the character has sexual agency?
- How do other people perceive this character’s sexual agency (i.e. negative, positive, neutral, etc.)? What makes you come to that conclusion?
- How are the character’s social identities factored into the group’s thoughts of the character’s sexual agency?
- How are the character’s social identities factored into people’s perception of the character’s sexual agency? For example, did they experience any challenges? How so?
- What is one way to support this character or celebrity’s sexual agency?

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Note to the Teacher: *Have them refer to the “Sexual Agency” newsprints (definition and class responses) but also acknowledge their examples can go beyond what has already been mentioned.*

A conversation about multiple truths can show up here. For example, celebrities of color may have financial privileges and/or social capital and yet still be system-impacted.

Have volunteers share their group’s responses with the larger group. (15 minutes)

STEP 6:

Have a closing conversation with the following discussion questions:

- What did you notice? What did you learn? (in their group work and/or lesson in general)
- What will you take away from this experience?

(5 minutes)

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

Step 4 is designed to address the first learning objective; Steps 2, 3, and 5 address the second learning objective; and Step 5 addresses the third learning objective.

HOMEWORK:

Have the participants think of one action they can take to support system-impacted communities (communities that have a history of being oppressed) in and outside of school in regards to sexual agency and sexual wellness. They can complete the stem, “I commit to…” Provide an example by sharing a commitment you have made, particularly with communities at the intersection of multiple oppressions.

[Written by Cindy Lee Alves for Advocates for Youth.]

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Complete and answer the following questions along with your group

When you think of sexual agency, who do you think of? Name a character or celebrity of color.
What makes you think they have sexual agency?

How do other people perceive this person's sexual agency (i.e. negative, positive, neutral, etc.)?
What makes you come to that conclusion?

How do their social identities (i.e. race, gender, etc.) factor into your thoughts of their sexual agency? Are their social identities factored into other people's/character's perception of their sexual agency (i.e. did they experience any challenges? How so?)

What is one way to support this person's sexual agency? What about communities they are a part of? This can be an action and/or a resource.

References

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