 Influences on body image

Suggested duration: 45-50 minutes

This activity has been designed to enable students to explore the social construction of beauty and how this may impact on various aspects personal identity. It also provides them with the opportunity to consider the positive and negative influences of technology on body image and self-concept.

Course outcomes

3.1 Evaluate how contextual factors influence attitudes, values and behaviours.

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.

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

* Identify the effects of social influences on body image, gender roles and sexuality.
* Clarify personal values and challenge negative perceptions and portrayals of body image in media and community.

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 * recognising and assessing strengths, aspirations and potential * self-concepts   Digital competencies   * ethical use of social media and digital platforms, e.g. sharing information and images, self-enhancement * positive and negative influences of technology, e.g. online communities, connecting with others, gaming, body image * being a positive influence |

Teaching notes

The media can have a significant impact on the body image of young people. It is important that students develop the skills to recognise and challenge negative perceptions and ideals when they are presented. Underlying messages evident in the media and throughout the community often impact on young people as much as overt messages.

Young people have identified body image as one of the biggest issues facing their age group.[[1]](#footnote-1) Body image and perceptions of self, form part of personal identity. Personal identity is one of the basic contributors to our health and wellbeing as it impacts on our thoughts and behaviours, relationships, feelings of connectedness and resilience.

For some senior students, adolescence is a key period for social and emotional development, and a time when they can face serious challenges to their wellbeing. Low self-esteem and distorted or negative perceptions of self can impact on young people at any stage of their development. It is important for teachers to be perceptive to signs of low self-esteem and negative body image, which are often associated with behaviours such as self-harm and disordered eating.

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 audiovisual 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).

Required resources and materials for preparation

* Blank paper per student or access to a draw application on a computer or mobile device
* Magazines, newspapers or a collection of images (online or offline portfolio)
* Collection of selfies

Learning experiences

Activity one – Self-perception (5-10 minutes)

1. Students take a blank piece of paper and a pen. Students place the pen in the centre of the paper and close their eyes. The remainder of the activity should be completed with eyes closed. Students listen to instructions while they construct a self-portrait on their page.
2. Teacher or facilitator reads out the script for students:
   * draw your head towards the top of the page, somewhere in the middle.
   * underneath this, draw your neck and body.
   * now, attach arms and hands to both sides of your body.
   * come to the legs. Don’t forget feet.
   * going back up to your head, draw your hair.
   * finally, add your eyes, mouth, ears and nose.
   * to complete this picture, draw your bellybutton.
   * open your eyes, and see what you’ve drawn.
3. Students share their self-portraits with others in the group.

Activity two – If I could be (5-10 minutes)

1. Students work individually to think about the ideals they hold regarding personal attributes. Students complete the statement, “If I could be anyone, I would be…. because …” and discuss with a partner.
2. Invite students to share their answers with the wider group. As a group discuss the questions:
   * how many examples provided by the group emphasise a desire to share personal traits such as personality compared to physical appearance?
   * predict how the group’s answers would be difference if the statement was “If I could look like anyone, I would…because…?
   * where do our ideas of beauty and ideal body characteristics come from?

Activity three – Media source analysis (10-15 minutes)

Teacher note: Many young people do not feel confident in their body and physical appearance. We often compare ourselves to ideas and perceptions of how we should look. These ideas often stem from media images, messages and ideals.

Teachers may wish to provide magazines, newspapers or a collection of images for students to use for the media sources activity. Alternatively students could collect and curate their own media portfolio for this activity. This could be done online or offline using appropriate media sources.

1. In small groups, students discuss and record body parts and aspects of the body they often hear young people describe in positive terms.
2. In their groups, students use their collection or portfolio of media sources to create a collage of images their group agrees are attractive or reflect beauty. Students should be encouraged to add words or phrases to describe beauty in their collage.
3. Students review their collage and discuss the following questions:
   * is beauty the same at all ages?
   * is beauty the same across various gender and cultural groups?
   * who decides what real beauty is?
   * what are some standards that are set by the media regarding beauty?
4. As a whole group, record common advertising techniques observed in the media that relate to beauty and body image. For example:
   * expert opinion (given by professionals or leaders in the field)
   * evidence (use of data or statistics)
   * compelling offers (something better than another company)
   * emotional appeal (arouse a strong feeling or emotion in consumers or target a concern or interest)
   * association (images used to produce positive feelings about products)
   * must haves (develop a need for the product to be happy, popular or satisfied)
   * fear (product will solve something e.g. acne or weight gain).
   * Share the following quote with the group.
   * “Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it”. (Source: Confucius)
5. Ask students to discuss with a partner:
   * what aspects of beauty are not shown in media?
   * how realistic are the standards of beauty set by media for most people?
   * how do media influence the image we have of family, relationships, sexuality and ourselves?
   * propose ways we can combat negative perceptions of ourselves.

Extension activity

1. Use Facebook or Twitter to record ideas of beauty using the hashtag #beautyis

Activity four – Influence of technology on body image and self-concept (20-25 minutes)

Teacher note: In national surveys of young people, body image is consistently ranked as a top concern for young people under the age of 25. The issue of body image is relevant to both young women and young men. A positive body image can help a young person develop a stronger sense of health and wellbeing.

1. In pairs, ask students to explain the concept of body image. Discuss positive body image – what does it look like, feel like and sound like? Use a Y chart to brainstorm ideas and words to reflect positive body image.
2. In pairs, students discuss how technology has impacted on body image and self-concept. Consider both positive and negative impacts of technology. For example:
   * positive - access to a wider range of images, access to information and support, apps to support healthy body image.
   * negative – exposure to explicit imagery and unrealistic images, cyber bullying, increased exposure to media and advertising.
3. In small groups, students discuss and record ideas:
   * what is a selfie? When did they start and why do they occur?
   * where, when and why might a person take a selfie?

Teacher note: The following activities are a sequence where students require hands on application. The hands on application of taking and critiquing selfies may not be necessary to the learning of some students. Some students may be able to move directly on to the group discussion. Teachers should identify the needs of their students before selecting the following activities.

1. Practical application - Where possible, students use mobile devices to take a selfie. The selfie should be individual.
2. Students share their selfies through an online space or by showing others in their group where they feel comfortable. Some students may choose to opt out of this activity. Alternatively, provide some sample selfies from online sources for students to complete the remaining activities.
   * Students record one positive aspect or one thing they like about the selfie of five students in the group (where possible).
   * Share these positives with the group.
3. Discussion - As a group discuss:
   * how quickly should a selfie be published?
   * where are the safe and appropriate places to publish selfies? What makes these places safe and appropriate for young people to publish selfies?
   * are selfies a reliable image of an individual? Why? Why not?
   * develop a list of criteria for a good selfie.
4. Dove has created a short film that shows how social media is reshaping the way we think about beauty.
   * As a whole group, introduce and view the short film [Selfie](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFkm1Hg4dTI) created by Dove.
   * Discuss what the film suggests about the impact of social media on our perceptions of beauty.

Mothers within the Dove film discuss the impact of social media on society’s ideas of beauty.

Quotes

Social media is widening the definition of what beauty is.

Social media is putting the reins in the hands of young people. The creativity of social media is definitely allowing young people to start to define for themselves what beauty is.

1. Discuss as a group how the selfie is redefining society’s idea of beauty. Include discussion of concepts like the “no makeup selfie” or the “first thing selfie”.
   * For example, instead of being surrounded by professionally touched and photoshopped images of models or actresses in fashion magazines or on social media such as Instagram, selfies can show images of real beauty. These natural images provide young people with a more realistic idea of beauty and body shapes.
2. The film’s ending suggests that beauty isn’t just about looks. “I think beauty if being strong and being brave and being happy with yourself,” one of the students says. “And I think that’s really beautiful.”
   * Ask students to share their thoughts on this idea with a partner – how should we define beauty?

1. Mission Australia, (2010) National Survey of Young Australians [↑](#footnote-ref-1)