

PICTURE TRICKS AND MIND GAMES

DIGITAL ALTERATION OF IMAGES IN THE MEDIA

Media
Stereotypes
Self-image
Women
Body image
Social media
Gender
Gender –based violence
Sexism
Objectification
Abuse
Gender stereotypes

- ✓ 1. For learners to understand that photos in advertisements are often digitally altered.
- ✓ 2. Understanding the impact of **social media** and ideal images on one's perception of beauty.
- ✓ 3. For learners to understand how enhanced media images can affect peoples' perception of reality and self-image.
- ✓ 4. For learners to understand altered images as a means for advertisers to sell products and make money.

45 Mins

★ A fast internet connection to stream a **video**.
★ A **data projector** and screen (or other suitable facility) to project the video.

PROCEDURE

PRIOR TO CLASS

- 1 Use two or all of the following videos for this activity:
 - Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty Video 'Evolution' (available at <http://www.dove.ca/en/Tips-Topics-And-Tools/Videos/Evolution.aspx>) and
 - Dove's Campaign for Redefine Beauty Video 'Selfie' (available at <http://unlooker.com/selfie/>) and/or
 - Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty Video 'Sketches' (available at <http://realbeautysketches.dove.com/>)

- 2 Set up the video(s) before the class begins to ensure that they have time to download and that they play smoothly.

IN CLASS

- 3 Show the video(s) for the class.
- 4 Ask learners to compare the perceptions of (Photoshopped) beauty as presented in the **media**, with that of real beauty as shown in the 'Sketches' and 'Selfie' videos.
- 5 Encourage learners to share their views on images and **stereotypes** in the media by asking questions like:
 - a. Do you compare your beauty to what is regarded as beauty in magazines and videos?
 - b. Do you think that the standards of beauty you see in the media are realistic and attainable?
 - c. Do you think that the picture in the ad (from the 'Evolution' video), along with other images in magazines and videos, trick people into believing something that is not true?

d. When you see an image in an advertisement, and you are not aware that it has been altered by a computer, how does it affect your **self-image** and the way you would like to look?

e. Do advertisements in the **media** create unrealistic expectations, for men and for women, regarding the way **women** should look? How might these expectations affect intimate and sexual relationships?

f. Do these messages apply to young people?

- 6 Then, ask learners to consider if campaigns, like Dove's 'Real Beauty' campaign, are successful at counteracting these stereotypes. Ask them to discuss the following:
 - a. Did the 'Dove' videos represent realistic standards and messages about beauty? In other words, how much did their 'real beauties' look like you or me?
 - b. Did learners see their own community adequately represented in the videos?
 - c. Did Dove represent race and body size accurately? How about class? Did they stereotype **gender**?
 - d. What positive messages were the videos trying to send? Are there any critiques we can we level at the videos? What are these?

- 7 Wrap up the discussion by encouraging learners to be mindful about the imagery and language used by the media. They should recognise that gender is often portrayed in a stereotypical and unrealistic way that seldom matches up with what real men and **women** look like. Their expectations of themselves and their friends should not be focused on these kind of images.

TEACHER TIPS

General

It is important to draw a connection between selling products and using unrealistic representations of males and (especially) females to sell those products. Encourage learners to take a sceptical view of advertisements – even Dove’s so-called ‘real beauty’ examples. Point out to learners that while these kinds of campaigns can be well regarded and effective, they should consider product advertising within a larger context. For example, the Dove brand is owned by the same company that produces and markets ‘Axe’, which creates sexualised commercials to sell men’s deodorant. Ultimately, most companies will use tactics to gain profit, so learners need to identify why these tactics are unrepresentative and have negative effects on **body image** and social constructs of **gender**.

Learners should also be encouraged to think about the way that ‘selfies’ and **social media** are both a positive and negative platform. On the one hand, they provide a mechanism for young **women** and girls to spread alternative images of beauty, but on the other, they encourage a culture in which women and girls continue to expose themselves to scrutiny and critique.

Making the Link with Gender & Violence

The images of **women** portrayed in magazines may perpetuate an acceptance of **gender-based violence**. For example, women may be shown as being subservient, and are often shown in ways that are sexualised (for example, the poses and body positions in which women are placed in advertisements) or show them to be consumerist. This is problematic because it sends the message that women can be seen as sexual objects.

Adverts that use digital enhancing are trying to create images of ‘perfect’ women, often for the purposes of making them appear sexy. The average person is continuously exposed to advertisements. If images repeatedly display sexist images, sexism and violence against women become normalised. If magazines repeatedly display sexist images, then **sexism**, **objectification**, and **violence** against women become normalised.

Adverts also create unrealistic expectations of beauty for both sexes, especially for young women. It is important that the learners understand the difficulty, if not impossibility, of attaining the beauty ideals they see presented in the media. Learners need to be aware of the impact these beauty standards have on their own self-esteem and how they can impact relationships and social attitudes.

Learners should reflect on how the media may portray **women** as powerless in society. They should understand how by constantly seeing, hearing and internalising that women are sex objects, meant to be attractive, have value only if they are pretty, have value to men only when they are young, have value only as mothers in the home might impact on young women’s self-image. Make the comparison between this process and the way that women in **abusive** relationships internalise the views and ideas of the abuser, that they are worthless, ugly, and only useful for **sex**.

Assessment Ideas

Ask learners to analyse advertisements either in magazines or on TV – noting down how these adverts show idealised or unrealistic representations of **gender**, race, age and the like. Learners’ responses should include what product the company is trying to market, and how representations are used to encourage viewers to buy specific products, paying particular attention to the use of **gender stereotypes**. Learners can present their findings in class once the assessment has been handed in.

Variations

1 If you have access to internet, show the following short video and ask learners to discuss why it is humorous and what message it is trying to send about the way media treats women’s bodies: <http://www.good.is/posts/intermission-what-if-gender-roles-in-advertising-were-reversed/>

2 The following documentary is very thorough in its explanation of problems in advertising today, specifically regarding the expectations for women and the (often violent) sexualisation of **women**: <http://www.thegreatplanet.com/killing-us-softly-4-advertisings-image-of-women/>

Although most of the statistics are from North America, the themes apply to South Africa. Learners can discuss specific examples of **gender stereotypes** in South African advertising. For comprehensive discussion questions for this film, look here: http://www.mediaed.org/assets/products/241/studyguide_241.pdf.

3 This documentary does a great job of showing the difference between media portrayal of men and women in politics: <http://www.movie2k.to/movie-947789-Miss+Representation.html>. It is also US-centred, but can be used to illustrate that problems still exist in countries such as the US, often thought to have more equality in terms of **gender**.

