



Critical media literacy & sexual violence prevention

Promoting culture change as critical media consumers

In 2010, NJCASA partnered with Media Literacy Project, New Mexico to create a custom media literacy strategy specific to sexual violence. Critical media literacy is an opportunity for individuals to challenge messages and norms, while also creating media messages that reflect their lived experience and hopes for the future. This fact sheet outlines some media literacy basics and tips for becoming a critical media consumer.

What is media literacy?

Media literacy refers to the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages of all kinds. These are **essential skills** in today's world. Many people get most of their information through complex combinations of text, images, and/or sounds. We need to be able to navigate this complex environment to make sense of the media messages that bombard us every day and to express ourselves using a variety of tools and technologies.

This process has the potential for significant personal transformation among young women and girls, who experience sexism, and other communities who have historically been ignored or made invisible by dominant media outlets and systems.

MEDIA SUPPORTING VIOLENCE

Media can contribute to harmful social norms by perpetuating rigid gender roles and stereotypes. When thinking about media's role in gender stereotypes it is important to consider that media aren't "just a movie" or "just a song." **We are heavily influenced by media.** Encouraging and promoting gender stereotypes upholds power imbalances in society and allows gender- and power-based violence to flourish.

Additionally, media can portray various forms of power-based violence in light-hearted, funny, or

Ways to be a proactive media consumer:

- Question what you see (or what you don't see) in the media
- Speak out against media you disagree with; speak up for media you DO agree with
- Start discussions with friends, family, or others on media messages
- Contact media industry executives and inform them of your opinions and dissatisfaction with their products

minimizing ways. When this happens frequently we, as individuals and as a society, can be desensitized to these forms of violence, ultimately lessening our collective ability to identify the acts as violent.

We can counter this phenomenon by being critical media consumers, while also educating ourselves on what sexual violence looks like. This combination of skills can support better understanding around power-based violence and help confront harmful gender, relationship, and sexuality norms.



THE LINK TO PREVENTION

NJCASA's media literacy curriculum, *Gender and Violence: How Media Shape Our Culture*, works to address individual-level risk factors such as hostility towards women, traditional gender role adherence, hypermasculinity, acceptance of violence, and denial or displacement of blame for sexual assault.

Additionally, the curriculum aims to promote healthy sexuality, provide alternatives to traditional masculinity, and offer counterexamples to dominant gender roles.

The curriculum has been implemented with communities throughout the state for a number of years. Experienced practitioners at Sexual Violence Programs have presented this information to schools, juvenile justice facilities, colleges and universities, caring parents and adults, and many more in an effort to create meaningful change.

Resources

Media Literacy Project

<http://medialiteracyproject.org/>

The Representation Project

<http://therepresentationproject.org/>

Miss Representation (film)

The Mask You Live In (film)

Media Education Foundation

Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats & Rhymes (film)

Further Off the Straight and Narrow (film)

New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault

www.njcasa.org

A full listing of rape crisis centers and contact information can be found on NJCASA's website. For immediate assistance call the 24-hour Statewide Hotline at 1-800-601-7200.

Gender and Violence: How Media Shape Our Culture helps communities:

- Analyze and evaluate media messages about gender and gender-based violence
- Identify how gender stereotypes in media contribute to institutional gender inequality
- Describe how power relations influence the concept of gender
- Explore possible linkages between media violence and norms around sexual violence