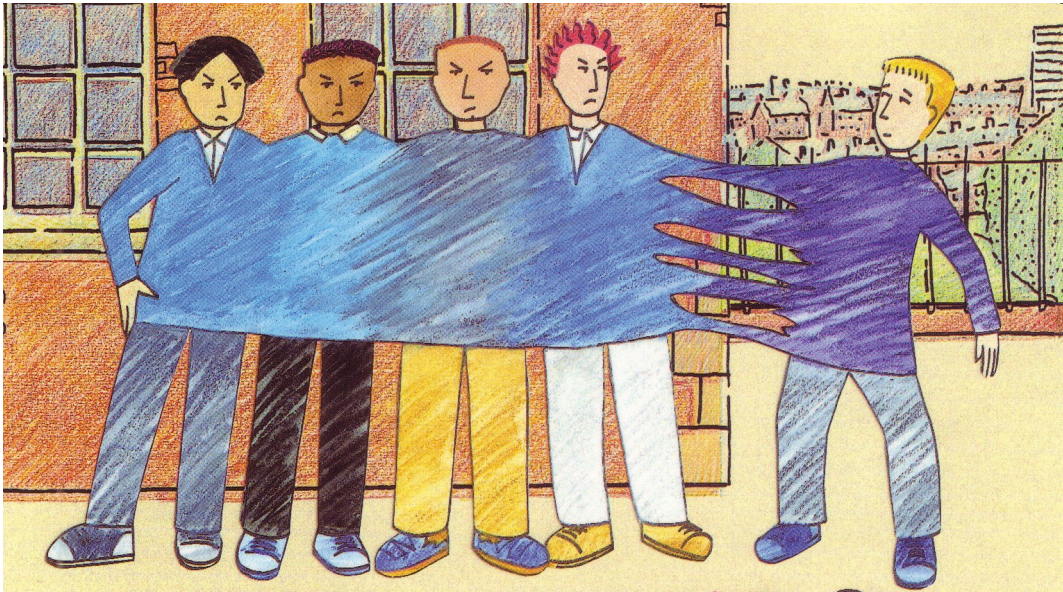


Tell It Like It Is

Bullying And Gender Stereotyping In School



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Tell It Like It Is

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Tell It Like It Is

Bullying And Gender Stereotyping In School

Using This Guide/Using This Video

This short animated video is designed to stimulate questions and discussion about problems faced by young people at school which result from gender stereotyping and associated bullying. It is particularly suitable for use by a teacher or youth group leader working with 11-15-year-olds. Discussion can be initiated by using the “Questions for Discussion” at the end of this guide.

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Summary

"Tell It Like It Is" is an imaginary television program that visits different schools to interview the students. This week the show is based at St. Ereotype's High School. Classmates Darren and Sharon are each given a camera and asked to keep a video diary. Then they are given an unexpected task: each is asked to provide a voice-over for the other's experiences. The results show the different worlds girls and boys live in, and their different anxieties.

Taking their video cameras to school, Sharon and Darren interview their schoolmates for the program's "Ask Around" slot. Sharon asks the students what they are learning in school. Instead of the usual subject areas, they talk about the hidden curriculum: the unspoken messages they receive from the structures of the institution itself, people's behavior within it, and the values implicit in learning methods and materials. We begin to find out what this teaches about gender, conformity and power relations.

Darren asks students about growing up: not the biological facts, but the feelings - pleasure, embarrassment, anxiety - which result from physical changes during puberty and adolescence. He finds that "feelings are important", and that the teenage years can be a time of great stress.

In the playground, the video diaries show that Sharon and Darren both have to deal with verbal and psychological bullying. As their understanding grows, they learn to interpret the ways other students communicate while trying to build feminine or masculine identities, and conform to or withstand peer pressure.

The young people become more aware of male violence - verbal, psychological, and physical - in school and in society at large. They begin to analyze, understand, and when necessary react against social pressure. They realize their ability to support each other, to help those who are being bullied, and to challenge oppressive or abusive behavior.

Interspersed with the video diary extracts are brief vignettes and one-line comments from other young people about school life.

"My school's great - everyone likes it. - Where's my Prozac? "

"School is a nightmare, from which one day I will wake up."

"School's all right, except when people laugh at you."

"I don't take any notice of what people say."

"What's worst is some of the boys shouting things and trying to grab you."

"I hate being called names."

Key points:

- Bullying and sexual harassment are a real problem in our schools.
- Anger and gender-based violence are the main contributing factors to bullying and sexual harassment.
- An unstable sense of identity – especially in the teenage years – can make young people susceptible to becoming a bully, a victim, or both.
- Fear may also play a role in bullying – this is especially true of homophobia.
- Every school should provide equal opportunities for all students.
- Ideally, all schools should have a policy in place against bullying and sexual harassment.
- Any policy against bullying and sexual harassment is only good as long as it is reviewed and enforced.

Sharon's Day

The assumption:

Darren thinks Sharon gets up early to spend a long time on her appearance.

The reality:

She gets up early because she has a lot to do: she is expected to get her little sister and brother ready and take them to school.

Many girls still do a much greater share of household tasks than boys.

Sharon does worry about her weight and appearance too, but this is understandable; she knows that people will call her names if she doesn't.

Girls are routinely expected to conform to certain standards of appearance and grooming, and are penalized if they fail to be what is considered attractive.

The assumption:

On the way to school, Darren thinks Sharon is being greeted by people she knows.

The reality:

She has to cope with "the usual hassle from men in the street"; and she avoids the short cut, as she knows it can be dangerous for girls to go there.

Most girls experience some level of verbal harassment every day, and live with the constant threat of physical assault.

The assumption:

At school, Darren thinks she is meeting her friends.

The reality:

Sharon feels intimidated by the boys' gang, "Rozzer's crew"; while also being aware that the girls' gang, "Rosa's posse", is "checking everybody out".

Girls sometimes exert power at school by policing their schoolmates to make sure they conform.

Darren's Day

The assumption:

Sharon spots that Darren has some privileges in comparison to herself: he does not have to look after younger children or make breakfast; and "nobody's hassling him in the street". She thinks he must be carefree and confident.

The reality:

Darren has his own worries, feeling inadequate because he is not what he thinks of as the "ideal boy" - big, strong and sporty.

The assumption:

Sharon sees Darren and his dad sitting down together and being given breakfast, and thinks they must be having a chat.

The reality:

Darren's father is critical and shows no sign of appreciating his abilities or interests. Meanwhile Darren's mother, doing all the housework, has no time to talk to him.

Studies have shown that boys receive less affection and emotional support than girls from an early age.

The assumption:

Seeing a group of boys coming up to Darren, Sharon thinks they are his friends.

The reality:

Darren also feels intimidated by Rozzer's gang.

Overall women and girls suffer most from male violence, however, the individuals most likely to be involved in violence outside the home - both as perpetrators and as victims - are young men.

It's Different for Girls...and Boys

As illustrated by Sharon and Darren's video, both boys and girls suffer from stereotyped expectations and the pressure to conform. Sharon is mistaken in assuming Darren leads a carefree existence. She correctly perceives that as a male in a traditional family he benefits from certain privileges. At home, little domestic work is expected from Darren or his father: his mother does laundry, childcare, cooking, and gets him up for school. However, Darren receives less attention and support from his family. In the street, Darren is free from the stress of unwanted attention and the fear of sexual assault. In society as a whole, and particularly in the teenage peer group, the sexual double standard still prevails: "slut" is a term of contempt, but a "stud" is envied and respected.

What is the Problem? - Bullying

Adolescence is a time when an unstable sense of identity can leave you at risk of actually believing what others say about you. It is also a time when relationships with peers are especially important. This combination of factors means that teenagers are particularly at risk of being bullied.

It is well known that bullying is a common problem amongst certain groups of people, including school students. It is also well known that this problem is almost unheard of amongst other groups - university students for instance. Rex Stainton Rogers writing in *Bullying* (ed. Michelle Elliott), looks at the reasons for this.

He points out that the students, having reached the age of 18, have not simply "grown out of it": other 18-year-olds in institutions such as prisons, army training camps, etc., show strong bullying tendencies. What makes universities different?

- Students are free to leave if they want; to move between subjects; to change where they live.
- No student is given power over others by the institution.
- Powers of staff over students are strictly constrained.
- There are often full-time security personnel on duty.
- No one is forced into sports, changing rooms, or confined areas.
- There is often special provision such as late-night buses for women students.
- Nobody is stuck in a location or situation they can't escape.
- If students have a problem there is a complex safety net of tutors, help lines, counselors, health centers, etc.

Rogers concludes that situations, not individual psychologies, are the key to bullying: any child can be a bully or a victim. Whereas it would be naive to say that authoritarian structures or schools cause bullying, he claims that the best way to help students is by empowering them, as students at a university are empowered. Both bully and victim must be free to draw on different resources and choose alternative identities.

Bullying (cont.)

In his book *Sexual Bullying*, Neil Duncan claims that in recent years the “burst of activity on bullying” has had the effect of “distracting attention from structural flaws in society”.

He goes on to list elements included in most definitions of bullying:

- It can be physical, psychological, or both; involving a wide range of activities and intensities according to circumstances.
- It demonstrates a power imbalance between the participants.
- Some estimates say around 10% of school pupils are involved.
- Boys are massively over-represented in bullying activities.
- Girls are more inclined to use emotional, rather than physical, modes of abuse: for instance, spreading rumors.

As Duncan points out, accepted definitions of bullying tend to overlook gender, class, and race factors. Focusing on the issue of gender, he refers to:

- The misogynist vocabulary used throughout schools: "there are no male equivalents of 'tart', 'scrubber', 'bitch', 'cow', 'slut'"
- The way boys act bored when girls answer questions in class
- The "general roughness of push and shove"
- "Pandemic physical molestation": grabbing breasts and buttocks, lifting skirts, snapping bra straps, etc.
- Girls' continual appraisal under the male gaze, and being subjected to comments

What is the Problem? – Violence and Gender

According to the American Institute on Domestic Violence (2001), 1,232 women are killed each year by an intimate partner. The AIDV also demonstrates 85-95% of all domestic violence victims are female, and an estimated 5.3 million women are abused each year.

This disparity toward women is often seen in other countries as well. Even more troubling is the attitude of young people in regard to domestic violence.

"Young People's Attitudes Towards Violence, Sex and Relationships", a research study by the University of North London and the University of Glasgow for the Zero Tolerance Trust, found the following results in February 1998: amongst young women in the UK aged between 14 and 21,

- 80% personally know at least one woman who has been hit by a male partner.
- 60% know at least one who has been sexually assaulted.

There was a worryingly high acceptance of sexual violence: when asked whether abuse/violence towards women was ever okay:

- 1 in 5 young men said that it was.
- 1 in 10 young women said that it was.
- 1 in 5 young men thought it acceptable for a man to force sex on his wife; a further 15% were unsure.

Some studies suggest there are links between television violence and the levels of violence in society. Consider these facts:

The average child in the United States watches 18,000 murders and 100,000 other violent acts on TV by the time he or she leaves elementary school.

- *The American Psychological Association*

In the U.S. our young boys spend about 28 hours a week watching TV. By the time they are 18, they have seen an average of 26,000 murders, a vast majority of them committed by men.

'Boys Will Be Boys' - *Myriam Miedzian*

What is the Problem? - Anger

Anger is often called a secondary emotion...people use it to cover up and protect themselves from other feelings which make them feel vulnerable, such as: humiliation, frustration, fear, hurt, rejection.

Recognizing this can help people to interrupt the chain reaction, which could otherwise lead to violence and abuse.

Anger itself is not negative, but the way it is expressed can be either healthy or harmful. There are three main ways of expressing anger:

1. Aggressively - this is anger directed at another person to hurt them physically, emotionally, or psychologically—examples are; hitting, shouting, or other forms of abuse.
2. Passively - when people avoid dealing with the situation that made them angry, they internalize the anger and feel resentful. Later they express the anger by causing damage, spreading rumors, or spiteful behavior.
3. Assertively - the best way to communicate feelings of anger is to express them directly and in a non-threatening way to the person involved; such as saying " I feel angry when you... "

What is the Problem? – Case Studies

These case studies out of the UK give us a glimpse of how bad bullying can be:

Carole developed anorexia and was seriously ill for over ten years, after she was teased by schoolmates about her developing curves.

"I was quite a big girl anyway and people used to mock me at school a lot. There was a lot of other pressure around too but people mainly focused on my weight. It was hard, especially at 12 when a lot of girls at school weren't very well developed at all but I was and it's difficult standing out."

Yorkshire Evening Post, 15 February 2000

Ben Smith, 14, was given permission to carry a personal alarm in his high school at Beccles, Suffolk, after he was beaten by four other pupils.

Guardian, 2 March 2000

A website to help victims of school bullying, www.pupiline.net, has been set up by two teenagers who suffered at the hands of other pupils in the playground. The 15-year-olds, a boy and a girl, of Colchester, Essex, have included advice, a forum, and help contacts on the site, which has been receiving more than 90 visitors an hour.

Daily Telegraph, 3 March 2000

Homophobia – A Problem That Affects Everyone

Homophobia means “fear of homosexuality”.

Homophobic behavior includes name-calling (fag, fairy, dyke, lesbo, pervert, queer, etc.) and physical violence. By branding them as outcasts, this has serious effects on daily life for people who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual. It has driven significant numbers of young people to commit suicide.

Homophobia also affects heterosexual people because of the role it plays in maintaining rigid gender roles and imposing needless restrictions on behavior.

Boys may adjust their behavior to avoid being called “gay”. This label can be conferred on those who have friendships with girls, or those who have no friendships with girls. Boys who aren't good at football, who show an interest in their schoolwork, who sit at the front of the class, or those boys who are simply unpopular may be labeled as “gay”. Affixing this label can make the heterosexual boy feel just as much an outcast as his homosexual counterpart—all because of unfounded fear.

Likewise, girls are afraid of being labeled lesbians for having close friendships with other girls, for enjoying sports, or for failing to display sexual interest in boys or male pop stars.

Current statistics bring this problem into stark relief:

- 97% of students in public high schools report regularly hearing homophobic remarks from their peers[1].
- 53% of students report hearing homophobic comments made by school staff[2].
- 80% of prospective teachers report negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian people[3].
- Two-thirds of guidance counselors harbor negative feelings toward gay and lesbian people[4].

statistics from: *the impact of homophobia on gay and lesbian youth* selected from GLSEN's website.
http://www.dreamworld.org/oystergsa/gsa_statistics.html

What Can Be Done? – Ask Questions!

Some Questions About Equal Opportunities In Your School

- How are tasks allocated in mixed gender groups?
- Is gender used to divide students' names, for example on class registers or other lists?
- Do boys and girls receive equal amounts of the teacher's time and attention in each class?
- Are rules, e.g. on school uniform, applied equally to girls and boys?
- Is the uniform restrictive in any way to either sex?
- Do texts and images used in class communicate stereotypical ideas about men and women's abilities/contributions/occupations?
- Do lessons give due recognition to women's activities and their contributions to knowledge in the field?
- Are girls and boys praised or reprimanded equally for the same qualities or achievements?
- Is conformity rewarded? Is expressing individuality discouraged?
- Are girls expected to serve boys, e.g. by supplying pens, information, help with homework?
- Are teachers scrupulous about using non-sexist language?
- Do teachers use the words "man" or "men" to mean "people"?
- Do teachers reinforce stereotypes by accepting rough, boisterous, aggressive behavior as normal for boys, or by describing girls as catty, bitchy, giggly or gossiping?
- Do students routinely use sexualized insults (slut, cow, poof, etc.)?
- Are these sexualized insults tolerated by other students and staff?
- Is the staff trying to shame boys by characterizing them as feminine, or comparing their achievements unfavorably with that of girls?
- Do staff attempt to shame girls by describing their behavior as unladylike?
- Do male students or staff behave inappropriately towards women and girls with use of innuendo, jokes, looks, or touching?
- Is it thought acceptable to make comments or jokes at someone's expense, for instance about their personal appearance or qualities?

What Can Be Done? – Look for a Policy

School Policies On Bullying And Sexual Harassment

The pre-requisites of a successful policy are:

1. Recognition - the need to recognize the problem
2. Openness - it is advisable before drawing up a policy to get a general agreement of intent to do so.
3. Ownership - as many members of the school community as possible should be involved: parents, teachers, pupils and principals.

Once the need for a policy has been recognized, a working party—not an individual—will need to draw it up. The first step will be to carry out a whole school investigation and consultation.

The policy may include sections on:

- What constitutes bullying and harassment in the school community concerned
- What will be done to deal with different cases of bullying and modes of harassment
- What training will be carried out to ensure that the issues are understood by students and staff
- How bullying and harassment will be recorded and monitored
- What provision will be made to support recipients and perpetrators, and/or impose sanctions
- What provision will be made to train peer support counselors
- A list of trained personnel to whom students or staff can go if they wish to make a complaint
- Details of how the effectiveness of the policy and the education programs will be evaluated

The policy and related educational work should stress the ability of young people to support each other, and the responsibility of the “silent majority” to intervene and prevent incidents from occurring.

Implementation of the policy will require that all school personnel—principal, vice principal, staff, students, and parents—should have access to a copy. The school policy and related topics should be addressed within the curriculum and training should be carried out regularly.

Incidents should be dealt with immediately, and any oppressive or abusive behavior challenged, in accordance to the policy. The policy should also be updated regularly; within this update all situations should be evaluated and reviewed.

For more information, see Michelle Elliott, *Bullying*, and Carrie Herbert, *Sexual Harassment in Schools: A Guide for Teachers*, both of which have been used in compiling this booklet.

Questions for Discussion

1. Does your school have a policy on bullying and sexual harassment? If so, take time to review it as a class or in small groups—be sure a copy goes home with each student as well. If not, work in groups or as a class to create a policy for your school—this is an opportune time to talk with your principal about a policy being in place.
2. Take some time to “tell it like it is” — what situations have students witnessed? In each situation, was this a case of bullying or sexual harassment? What could the victim possibly do in each situation? Ideally, no names are to be used (embarrassment is something to avoid as a teen!), rather, the individuals should be referred to as “the victim” and “the bully”.
3. Can you be a bully or a victim? Create situations of bullying—this is a great chance for some role-playing. Divide into small groups; one person is the bully, one person is the victim, and any others of the group are friends of either the bully or victim. After each situation, the group can discuss what was said, and options to change or defuse the situation. Ideally each person takes a turn at victim and bully.
4. Who is your role model and why? This question should be answered on paper or verbally for each student. There is no right or wrong answer—everyone has a different view of whom they admire and would like to emulate.
5. Have you given in to peer pressure? Take time to talk about peer pressure experiences. What could be said or done to avoid “giving in” to what others want you to do?

Tell It Like It Is

Multiple Choice Worksheet

Circle the best available answer for each of the following:

- 1.) Which gender of young people typically has more household duties?
 - a) girls
 - b) boys
 - c) both—all duties are typically shared equally

- 2) Why didn't Sharon walk through the park on her way to school?
 - a) because her mom told her not to
 - b) because her friend didn't want to
 - c) because a girl was attacked there last year
 - d) because it's a longer walk

- 3) Why was Phil, Darren's friend, embarrassed in Biology class?
 - a) because he flunked the test
 - b) because he'd grown and was suddenly the tallest in the class
 - c) because he'd sneezed
 - d) because his friend yelled at him

- 4) Why didn't Carl want to show his emotions?
 - a) because he was afraid he'd cry
 - b) because Darren told him not to
 - c) because he really didn't have any
 - d) because he was afraid people would laugh

- 5) What is one way young people can learn how to become men and women?
 - a) pick on people different from them
 - b) drop out of school early
 - c) choose a role model
 - d) do everything their friends tell them to do

- 6) In the video, Rozzer is -
 - a) a nice guy
 - b) Darren's best friend
 - c) Sharon's best friend
 - d) a bully

Tell It Like It Is

Multiple Choice Worksheet *Answer Key*

Circle the best available answer for each of the following:

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b) Darren's best friend
c) Sharon's best friend
d) a bully

For More Information...

ORGANIZATIONS & WEBSITES

Kidscape....helping to prevent bullying and child abuse 1985-2006.
<http://www.kidscape.org.uk/professionals/whybeconcerned.html>

Kidpower Services for Children 6-14: Skills to help children stay safe and act wisely with strangers, bullies, and people they know.
<http://www.kidpower.org/School-age.html>

Pacer Center's Kids Against Bullying
<http://www.pacerkidsagainstabullying.org/>

U.S. Department of Justice COPS—Bullying in Schools
<http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/mime/open.pdf?Item=272>

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