

# Youth Talk Back:

Sex, Sexuality, and Media Literacy

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

May 2000

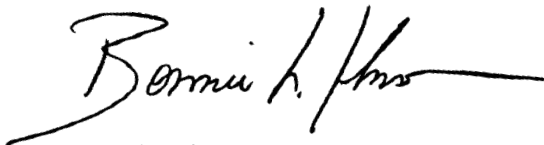


## Foreword and Acknowledgements

The Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada (PPFC) is pleased to present this teacher's guide to accompany *Youth Talk Back: Sex, Sexuality, and Media Literacy*. The product of a national project that brought together youth advisors from across Canada, *Youth Talk Back* is designed to teach young people about the relationship between media and sexuality. The purpose of this *Guide* is to provide educators with an overview of *Youth Talk Back* as well as some teaching tips and suggestions.

PPFC is a national voluntary organisation that works with affiliates in 68 communities in Canada. Our goal is to ensure that Canadians have access to universal, reliable information and services in order to make informed decisions related to their sexual and reproductive health. We work from an unbiased, choice-oriented and sex positive approach.

We thank our contributor, Health Canada for the opportunity, and we thank our affiliates who continue to provide exceptional service to their clientele, often in the face of harsh fiscal realities. We especially thank the young people who worked with us on this resource—for their time, their commitment, and for their infectious enthusiasm for the project.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bonnie Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Bonnie Johnson  
Executive Director  
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## Why use *Youth Talk Back*?

Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada developed *Youth Talk Back* with support from Health Canada. Twenty-eight youth<sup>1</sup> (between 13 and 25 years of age) from across Canada pilot tested the kit and their feedback has ensured that the content is relevant, helpful, meaningful and interesting. *Youth Talk Back* is also:

- UNIQUE** Unlike other media literacy programs available, *Youth Talk Back* focuses on sex and sexuality. This combination makes it especially valuable as teachers can combine instruction on media literacy with sexual health.
- APPEALING** The kit, through its subject matter and suggested activities, was designed to appeal to young people. While it treats the subject seriously, it uses humour to make participants feel at ease. The graphics have been carefully chosen to reflect youthful tastes.
- OBJECTIVE** The kit promotes choice in the area of sexual health. It doesn't preach, moralize or make value judgements, nor does it portray the media as bad or good. Rather, the kit encourages young people to decide for themselves if and when media messages are fair or unfair, accurate or inaccurate, biased or objective, realistic or unrealistic.
- FLEXIBLE** Although the information in the kit has been assembled to offer a logical learning progression, participants can skip some modules or go through the kit contents in any order.

## Why combine media literacy with sexual health education?

All of us are bombarded with conflicting sexual images and messages in the mass media. American research indicates that, during prime-time evening hours, network shows include an average of 28 references to, or depictions of, sexual activity but less than 1 reference per hour to contraception, abortion, sexually transmitted infections or sexuality education.<sup>2</sup> This is especially significant given that adolescents watch on average 17.3 hours of television per week<sup>3</sup> and that they are very concerned about their own developing sexuality.

Studies have found that media and entertainment images play an important role in shaping youth knowledge, attitudes and practices toward sex.<sup>4</sup> The main sources of information about sexuality for teenagers include parents and other adults, peers, and the news and entertainment media. Young people often turn to the media for information about their sexual health, especially in parts of Canada where sexual health education is given little attention. Young people also

1 Although francophone youth participated in the development of *Youth Talk Back*, they referred almost completely to English media when evaluating the kit. As a result, *Youth Talk Back* does not have references to or examples from French media and thus may not be as applicable to youth who interact solely with French media.

2 Alan Guttmacher Institute. *Sex and America's Teenagers*. New York: AGI, 1994.

3 Statistics Canada. Average hours per week of television viewing. <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/People/Culture/arts23.htm> Provincial averages vary from a low of 16.0 in BC and Alberta to a high of 18.9 in Newfoundland and PEI.

4 Health Services Promotion Branch, Health and Welfare Canada. Report on Adolescent Reproductive Health. Ottawa: Health and Welfare Canada, 1990.

refer to the media to get details about sexuality that are not available from more formal sources: in particular, information about the emotional or experiential aspects of sexuality, how to attract and please partners, information about same-sex relationships, and other kinds of sexual expression.<sup>5</sup>

With the growth of information technology, adolescents increasingly have access to the Internet as another source of information about sexuality. While many organizations maintain sex positive and youth positive sites, these are by no means the only images and messages that young people get from the Internet. Much of the material contains the same stereotypical images of women's bodies, gender relations and sexual norms that dominate more traditional media. Fear-based, inaccurate and irresponsible messages are easy to transmit via the Web. Of equal concern to many parents is the easy access to pornographic material and the negative effect such material may have on adolescent mental and sexual health.

In response, health educators recommend that media literacy training be included as a part of comprehensive sexual health education. The *Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education* (Health Canada, 1994) suggest that such training can serve "to help individuals identify the variety of sexual messages that are conveyed by media, and to contemplate what these messages may mean for individual and societal health."<sup>6</sup>

Further, Susan Bordo, a cultural analyst in the US notes:

**"Popular culture ... has a profound effect on teenage sexuality. That's where they get their ideas about what is attractive, what's feminine, what's masculine, what's cool, what's sexy, what's romantic. ... People may respond to these images in different ways, but no one exists outside them in a bubble of cultural immunity. We are all – parents, peer groups, rich, poor, black and white – inhabitants of this culture."**<sup>7</sup>

By combining media literacy and sexual health education, *Youth Talk Back* gives students the tools they need to become active media consumers. At the same time it provides them with the opportunity to explore the relationship between the media and their own ideas about sex and sexuality.

## Goals of *Youth Talk Back*

- to encourage youth to develop a healthy and positive view of their own sexuality
- to give young people the knowledge and skills they need to understand and challenge media messages on youth sexuality
- to provide young people with the opportunity to speak out about their needs and concerns
- to help youth develop an informed and critical understanding of the nature of mass media, the techniques used in media, and the impact of those techniques on their lives
- to encourage youth to communicate their opinions about media messages to peers and the mass media itself
- to provide young people with the ability to create their own media products

5 Catia Creatura. *Completing the Picture: Adolescents Talk About What's Missing in our Sexual Health Services*. A joint project of the Haldimand-Norfolk Regional Health Department and the Regional Niagara Public Health Department. Spring 1998.

6 Laboratory Centre for Disease Control, Health Canada. *Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education*. Ottawa: Health Canada, 1994. p. 14 (<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpb/lcdc/publicat/sheguide/index.html>)

7 Susan Bordo. "Love, lies and fantasy: a cultural analysis" from *Teen Sexuality in a Culture of Confusion*, a multi-media project of Know Turner Associates.

# Contents & learning outcomes

CONTENTS	LEARNING OUTCOMES
<p><b>MODULE 1:</b>  <b>The mass media</b> explains the importance of being media literate in our culture, provides definitions of media terms and helps participants challenge media messages.</p>	<p><b>Students will</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand how the mass media operates</li> <li>• recognise who holds the power to make decisions about the content of mass media messages</li> <li>• support or challenge overt and subtle mass media messages</li> <li>• understand the importance of being an active and discerning media consumer</li> <li>• distinguish between biased and unbiased reporting and other message delivery</li> <li>• express opinions on media messages to peers and the media sources</li> <li>• create and use media to communicate with peers and decision-makers</li> </ul>
<p><b>MODULE 2:</b>  <b>Culture and mass media</b> focuses on the relationship between society and the mass media using sociological principles.</p>	<p><b>Students will</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand how the mass media operates</li> <li>• recognise who holds the power to make decisions about the content of mass media messages</li> <li>• support or challenge overt and subtle mass media messages</li> <li>• identify the variety of sexual messages present in the mass media</li> <li>• analyse how the mass media affects sexual attitudes and behaviour</li> <li>• discuss the impact of media messages on young peoples' sexual health choices and well-being</li> <li>• explain the importance of being an active and discerning media consumer</li> <li>• distinguish between biased and unbiased reporting and other message delivery</li> <li>• express opinions on media messages to peers and the media sources</li> </ul>
<p><b>MODULE 3:</b>  <b>Socialization, self-esteem and the mass media</b> explains how the mass media perpetuates gender roles and can affect the media consumer's self-image and behaviour.</p>	<p><b>Students will</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support or challenge overt and subtle mass media messages</li> <li>• identify the variety of sexual messages present in the mass media</li> <li>• analyse how the mass media affects sexual attitudes and behaviour</li> <li>• discuss the impact of media messages on young peoples' sexual health choices and well-being</li> <li>• explain the importance of being an active and discerning media consumer</li> <li>• distinguish between biased and unbiased reporting and other message delivery</li> <li>• express opinions on media messages to peers and the media sources</li> <li>• make informed personal decisions on sexual issues and conduct</li> </ul>

<p><b>MODULE 4:</b>  <b>Advertising</b> explores how advertisers use sex and sexual situations to sell their products, and it encourages students to notice subtle messages about gender relations, sex-role stereotyping and self-image.</p>	<p><b>Students will</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand how the mass media operates</li> <li>• recognise who holds the power to make decisions about the content of mass media messages</li> <li>• support or challenge overt and subtle mass media messages</li> <li>• identify the variety of sexual messages present in the mass media</li> <li>• analyse how the mass media affects sexual attitudes and behaviour</li> <li>• discuss the impact of media messages on young peoples' sexual health choices and well-being</li> <li>• explain the importance of being an active and discerning media consumer</li> <li>• express opinions on media messages to peers and the media sources</li> <li>• create and use media to communicate with peers and decision-makers</li> </ul>
<p><b>MODULE 5:</b>  <b>Sexuality and the mass media</b> focuses on myths, sexual taboos, gender roles, sexual activity and the question: "Does the mass media present a realistic view of sexual relationships?"</p>	<p><b>Students will</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support or challenge overt and subtle mass media messages</li> <li>• identify the variety of sexual messages present in the mass media</li> <li>• analyse how the mass media affects sexual attitudes and behaviour</li> <li>• discuss the impact of media messages on young peoples' sexual health choices and well-being</li> <li>• explain the importance of being an active and discerning media consumer</li> <li>• distinguish between biased and unbiased reporting and other message delivery</li> <li>• express opinions on media messages to peers and the media sources</li> <li>• create and use media to communicate with peers and decision-makers</li> <li>• make informed personal decisions on sexual issues and conduct</li> </ul>
<p><b>MODULE 6:</b>  <b>How — and when — to talk back</b> offers suggestions on how to communicate with the mass media, including tips for dealing with reporters and editors.</p>	<p><b>Students will</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand how the mass media operates</li> <li>• recognise who holds the power to make decisions about the content of mass media messages</li> <li>• express opinions on media messages to peers and the media sources</li> </ul>

# Using *Youth Talk Back*

As an educational resource and tool, *Youth Talk Back* provides information, encourages discussion and the sharing of ideas, fosters creative expression, and develops critical thinking. The kit can be used in a formal classroom setting, in a youth group, in a workshop setting or for independent study. The entire kit, or specific modules, can be easily adapted to enhance learning in a variety of subjects, including:

- sex education
- health education
- media literacy
- social studies
- English
- communications
- history
- current events

## Methodology

One, two or all modules in *Youth Talk Back* can be used in several ways:

- for independent study
- as a basis for a group discussion
- as a resource for a small- or large-group project
- to supplement a specific class
- to provide content and activities for a workshop
- to generate role-playing and other creative classroom activities
- to establish a club or other extracurricular group

## Skills development

The contents of the kit, as well as the supplementary activities on pages 8 & 9 of this guide, allow you to help participants to develop specific skills in several areas, including:

- verbal expression
- oral and written presentation
- writing (creative and factual)
- critical thinking
- creative design
- listening
- information collection
- computers and the Internet
- self-analysis
- teamwork

## Program delivery

The information within this kit may be used or adapted for:

- demonstrations and presentations
- guest speakers
- creative writing
- role-playing
- brainstorming
- class discussion
- journal writing
- panel discussion
- self-assessment
- small- or large-group projects
- debates
- factual writing
- historical analysis
- media analysis
- research
- current events study

# Hands-on activities

Each module in *Youth Talk Back* has a number of hands-on activities that are designed to help participants develop skills, from verbal expression to critical thinking. Activities include media monitoring activities, chat room/classroom exercises, talkback tips and bias detectors.

**Media monitoring activities** call for participants to keep a journal in which they record their personal thoughts and observations about specific media messages. For example,

## Media monitoring activity #10

Watch some mainstream TV programs designed for young people. Use your journal to analyze the ads by answering the following questions: How many clearly target young men or young women? How do they do that? Do they use sex? If so, is the image of the female or male that of a whole person or just a body? If any ad uses a young male or female model, is one or are both featured partially clad? If so, which parts are featured?

**Chat room/classroom exercises** provide media-related discussion topics for the Internet or the classroom as well as activities for groups. For example,



## CHAT ROOM/ CLASSROOM EXERCISE #21

**DISCUSSION.** Near the end of the '99 season, Ally McBeal delivered a speech to her roommate saying she wanted a partner for life, a white picket fence, kids and sex. "I like sex," she said. After losing Greg because of a kiss-and-tell moment with Billy, she hires a male escort to make Greg jealous and re-kindle his interest. Being Ally, she falls for the male escort. Here's a successful lawyer with sufficient money to do as she pleases. Does this fixation with marriage and babies represent the way today's young women feel? If so, is this a good thing? Do men feel the same way? Who is the audience for Ally McBeal?

**ACTIVITY.** Identify male and/or female characters on TV or in movies, or singers/groups that you feel best convey a healthy, responsible and realistic attitude towards sex.

**Talkback tips** offer ways for participants to express their opinions — favourable or unfavourable — to the mass media and other decision-makers. There also are tips to help them create their own media. For example,

## Talkback Tip #1

You know what you like and you know what you don't like. Get your opinions — and those of your group — on record. One way is to create a Web site to post the results of some of the activities and discussions you have had while going through this kit. Check your school or public library for a book that suits your level of expertise, whether techie or technopeasant.

Or search for guidelines online. Check out [www.webreference.com](http://www.webreference.com) or any of the major search engines.

**Bias detectors** supply clues to help participants recognise bias in mass media messages. For example,

## BIAS DETECTOR #7

### Keep an eye out for unnecessary personal descriptions.

When you're reading a story that mentions a person's sex, age, race, religion or sexual orientation and that information is not necessary to the story, you may have spotted bias. For example, a story that refers to a "woman doctor" or a "lady firefighter" may be more interested in highlighting the fact that the story involves women than in the story itself.

# Supplementary activities

The contents of *Youth Talk Back* can be adapted for several courses, from history to sex education. For example:

MODULE	SUGGESTED ACTIVITY
<p><b>Introduction</b></p>	<p><b>Discussion:</b> A group discussion about the following questions: Can and does the mass media shape our attitudes, form our opinions, and/or influence our behaviour? Does the mass media simply reflect society's ideas, ideals and values, or does it create them?</p>
<p><b>MODULE 1:</b> The Mass Media</p>	<p><b>Guest speaker:</b> Invite a guest speaker — a newspaper editor, a TV news director, a radio DJ or a magazine writer — to talk to the group. Pick a topic for the speaker. E.g. How do the media make decisions about the stories they will use, the people they will quote, the length of the story, etc.?</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Assign a participant to write and deliver the introduction to the guest speaker.</p>
<p><b>MODULE 2:</b> Culture and mass media</p>	<p><b>Brainstorming:</b> Have the participants create a list of the stereotypes (positive and negative) they have heard. One way to stimulate discussion of these stereotypes is to ask them to fill in the blanks with generalizations about certain groups. For example:</p> <p>All women are _____</p> <p>All teenagers are _____</p> <p>All gay/lesbian people are _____</p> <p>All men are _____</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Discuss the stereotypes from one or more perspectives. How and why have these stereotypes formed? How do stereotypes help or hurt groups?</p>
<p><b>MODULE 3:</b> Socialization, self-esteem and the mass media</p>	<p><b>Media analysis:</b> Ask the participants to cut out all the photographs featuring men, women and children from a daily newspaper. The object of this exercise is to see if there are major differences in the portrayal of males and females in the news environment. The participants can assemble their photographs on a bulletin board and discuss their findings in small groups, or they can prepare a paper that details their findings.</p> <p><b>Research project:</b> Have the participants research attitudes towards gender roles throughout history. To stimulate their interest, present and discuss the following quote from the Roman, Marcus Porcius Cato (234 – 149 BC):</p> <p>“The husband is the judge of his wife. If she has committed a fault, he punishes her. If she has drunk wine, he condemns her. If she has been guilty of adultery, he kills her. If you were to catch your wife in adultery, you would kill her with impunity, without trial. But if she were to catch you, she would not dare to lay a finger upon you, and indeed, she has no right.”</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Put them in teams of two or three and assign a specific time period to each team. The resulting papers could be assembled into one document and copies provided for each participant.</p>

<p><b>MODULE 4:</b> Advertising</p>	<p><b>Group project:</b> Have each participant bring in one or more examples of advertising that gratuitously uses sex to sell a product. They can then create an Advertising Hall of Shame on a bulletin board or other surface. Participants can discuss whether or not they agree with one another's choices.</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> To ensure fairness, participants could be asked to bring in copies of advertising that use sex in creative, appealing and non-harmful ways.</p>
<p><b>MODULE 5:</b> Sexuality and the mass media</p>	<p><b>Oral presentation:</b> Put participants in small groups, and ask each group to tape a music video that they feel presents a positive or negative image of sexual relationships. After each group plays the video for the class, the group members present the rationale behind their choice.</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Ask an older person to do the same exercise and present their choice to the class. Discuss the generational differences, if any.</p>
<p><b>MODULE 6:</b> How — and when — to talk back</p>	<p><b>Writing assignment:</b> Have participants use the guidelines on writing a letter to the editor to prepare a piece complimenting or criticizing the newspaper's or magazine's coverage of a story or treatment of an issue.</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Give information on how they can search the Web for the appropriate Web site so they can send their letter via e-mail.</p>
<p><b>Conclusion</b></p>	<p><b>Panel discussion:</b> Invite a group of advertisers, journalists, public relations practitioners, parents, etc. to discuss a media-related topic such as: Does the media (through programs, news stories and advertising) play a responsible role in presenting images and information about youth sexuality?</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Invite the panel members yourself, or have the participants choose the members and issue the invitation.</p>

# Contact Information

If you have any questions or comments about *Youth Talk Back*, please direct them to:

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