

The impact of online influencers and misogyny (16-19 year olds)



Classroom activity

Summary:

This short activity provides students with the opportunity to discuss the impact that comments made by online influencers can have on society. Students will be given a series of statements by online influencers and media personalities. Students will then rate these statements against a range of criteria. They will have a chance to discuss and explain their selection.

Learning objectives:

- At the end of the session, students will be able to understand the impact that online influencers and misogyny can have on individuals.
- Students will feel more confident to ask questions about online influencers and know where to access support.

Duration:

20 minutes to form part of another lesson (e.g. PSHE, Citizenship, English or Sociology)

Age group:

Secondary: Years 11-13

Materials required:

- Printouts of statements (placed around the room, keep the author a secret for now!)

CONTENT WARNING: This activity includes content which may be upsetting to some teachers and students. It may be useful to speak with the school's safeguarding / SEND team before undertaking this activity to check if any students in the class could be particularly vulnerable during discussions about sexism, sexual abuse, body image and mental health. However, we recommend delivering this activity with the presumption that someone in the room will have experienced these issues.

Instructions:

Step 1: Introduce the lesson objectives (2 mins)

- To explore statements made by online influencers and media personalities in an effort to identify their meaning and impact.
- To decide which statement is the least or most harmful, the most extreme and the most outdated. After you have made your selection, be prepared to justify your response.

Step 2: Establish a safe space agreement (5 mins)

- Ensure students are aware of how to have a productive and healthy discussion including; respectful listening, confidentiality, empathy, recognition of the experiences of others and participation.

Step 3: The activity (13 mins)

- Ask students to go around the room and read each of the statements (students could be numbered to make this easier e.g. all students who are numbered 5 will start with statement 5 and then work clockwise around the room).
- In turn, ask students to stand by the statement that they consider to be:
The least harmful, the most harmful, the most extreme and the most outdated

Suggested alternative activity format: Mini whiteboards could be utilised, asking students to write down the number of the statement they consider to be the most harmful etc and hold up the whiteboards when the teacher asks them to. This would avoid potential pressure on students to conform to the views of others, and might be more suitable in smaller spaces where there is less room to move around.



3. "No one cares about the men who fail"

(Jordan Peterson in the LA Times, 2018)

An alternative perspective: It's essential that boys are supported and if boys are in need of support they should talk to someone that they trust. There are so many opportunities available to boys that they should not feel they have to meet certain stereotypical societal expectations. These expectations can include men not talking about their emotions, being seen as weak if they cry and having to be brave even if they don't feel it. Gender stereotypes about men and women have a negative effect on everyone.

Questions to consider:

- What support is available for students in this school?
- Do you know who to talk to if you have any questions?
- Can you think of any other societal expectations based on gender stereotypes?
- Why might criticising someone who makes a mistake or doesn't meet a goal be harmful?
- What can you learn from failure? Is it a normal part of being a human being?

4. "Women are likely to prioritize their children over their work... especially conscientious and agreeable women."

(Jordan Peterson in the LA Times, 2018)

An alternative perspective: This comment is particularly troubling for several reasons. It suggests that looking after your children doesn't count as work, when it can be one of the most challenging jobs. It also glorifies the traditional role of women, to be at home and not join the paid workforce, which we know is good for their mental health and the economy. The use of the word 'agreeable' also suggests that women should be obedient and follow expectations that they may not agree with.

Questions to consider:

- How has the role of women in the workplace and the home changed over the years?
- Do you think that we have equity in the workplace and at home?
- What happens if a woman doesn't want children?
- Do all women want or have children?
- What role do men play in parenting? What role should they play?
- Are men considered to be unconscientious and disagreeable if they prioritise their work?

5. "Over the years I have been super self-critical of my body, but not anymore. From now on I am going to be grateful for my body and what it allows me to do. REPEAT after me, I love my body and ALL of its perfect imperfection".

(Dr Alex George, Twitter, 2022)

An alternative perspective: It's not just women who receive criticism about their bodies and pressure to conform to unrealistic stereotypes about body image. Men have a lot of pressure to conform to the stereotypes of being what is seen as 'masculine', strong and fit. This can lead to overexercise, radical or unhealthy changes in diet and low self-esteem. What's most important is that you are healthy and happy. You should take part in activities, enjoy your body for everything it enables you to do in life and eat food that you enjoy! Everyone looks different and that's what makes the world interesting. It's great if you do want to exercise and eat healthily, but make sure you feel happy in your own skin.

Questions to consider:

- How does this post make you feel?
- Where could you access support if you were worried about yourself or others?
- Who are the positive male role models that you follow online? How about positive female role models?

To continue the discussion about gender stereotyping with students, you might wish to use UK Feminista's ['Exploring Gender Stereotypes' classroom activity](#).