

# PISC

PARTNERS  
IN  
SOCIAL  
CHANGE

A Publication of the  
**Sexual Assault  
Prevention Resource  
Center**, dedicated to  
providing technical  
assistance to those  
engaged in sexual  
violence prevention  
in Washington State

WASHINGTON COALITION OF SEXUAL ASSAULT PROGRAMS

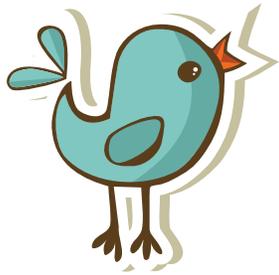
SUMMER 2014

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Media  
Literacy

SMS



Let's  
unpack  
that

**H**ave you ever heard the phrase “let’s unpack that”? Sometimes I think that might be the slogan at the heart of primary prevention work. If telling communities that rape or sexual violence is wrong was enough, I think we would all be out of jobs by now. The thing about rape culture that makes it challenging to dismantle is that it can be really hard to see. It’s woven into the fabric of almost everything – and especially the media.

It’s our task to help communities start to see the sometimes subtle ways we all participate in and consume messages that reinforce rape culture. One of the fun ways we can do this work in our communities, and especially with youth, is to build media literacy skills. Media Literacy is a 21st century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and participate with messages in a variety of forms — from print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy.<sup>1</sup>

The articles in this issue of PISC provide a framework to understand the importance of media literacy skills and its relationship to sexual violence prevention work. We begin by providing a theoretical basis and research findings on the impact of problematic media messages and media literacy skills. The next articles delve into specific instances of rape culture in the media and programmatic work. We finish this issue with our Question Oppression and Resources sections to help further the conversation about media literacy in your work.

We hope this issue will provide you with ideas and tools to build media literacy skills and engage communities in meaningful dialogue to end sexual violence.

We welcome feedback at [prevention@wcsap.org](mailto:prevention@wcsap.org).

Cordially,

Kat Monusky, Prevention Specialist  
WCSAP, Prevention Resource Center



### **Editor’s Note**

*A special thanks to WCSAP’s Prevention Intern, Mika, for their contributions and support to this issue of PISC!*

*You may or may not notice that WCSAP sometimes uses “they” as a singular pronoun in our publications. Language is a powerful tool. It is ever evolving to reflect our culture. We create new words and use words in new ways to reflect our lived experiences and identities. WCSAP strives to reflect this cultural progression when discussing the experiences of survivors and advocates of all genders.* 

<sup>1</sup> Definition retrieved from the Center for Media Literacy.



**WCSAP**  
Washington Coalition of  
Sexual Assault Programs



Volume XVII  
MEDIA LITERACY

*The mission of the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs is to unite agencies engaged in the elimination of sexual violence through education, advocacy, victim services, and social change.*

*The Prevention Resource Center is a project of WCSAP, designed to provide support and technical assistance to individuals, communities, and agencies engaged in sexual violence prevention within Washington State.*

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*is published by the WCSAP Prevention Resource Center from its office in Olympia, Washington. The focus of this publication is to present information and resources for the prevention of sexual violence, with a special emphasis on social change.*

*For membership information, visit [www.wcsap.org](http://www.wcsap.org).*

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# Foundations of Media Literacy

Mika Semrow, WCSAP Prevention Intern

**R**ape culture has been a buzzword in the news as of late, and while it is beyond the scope of this article to delve into the specifics of the discussion, it has renewed the spotlight on media influences. Feminism, the movement that bore anti-violence work, has always taken a critical eye to the media. *Killing Us Softly*, a movie now in its fourth installment but first released in 1979, picked apart media depictions of women and the ways in which they affected society's views. Currently this is still happening through avenues such as the film *Miss Representation*, *Bitch Magazine's* monthly critiques, and feminist blogs that regularly point out the subtle and not-so-subtle sexist tropes in media. To this day, there are still advertisements that portray women who go a day without shaving or waxing their legs as men, and ones that regularly compare women to objects of consumption. The lingering question is why is this important? Feminists (and, by extension, those in anti-violence movements) are often portrayed as killjoys, complaining for the sake of it or not being able to "take a joke." Consider, for instance, the recent incident in Spokane, Washington where a bar promoted a drink called "date grape kool-aid." When anti-violence activists asked that they change the name, the bar went on the defensive, suggesting that it was a joke of little importance, and that the protesters needed a drink, or therapy. For these reasons and more, most people would agree that media literacy is important. Yet, the "why" often remains unquestioned or unspoken.

First, let us consider the implications of the term media literacy. Literacy is at the crux of traditional western education. Though it commonly refers to written language, in this instance, it implies something different. Broadly, it demands of people the ability to interpret messages from ambiguous content and see the cultural assumptions and norms behind those messages. Implications for sexual violence prevention are numerous. We see sexual encounters with ambiguous messaging on

television every day, not to mention the various allusions to rigid gender roles that suggest women be the gatekeepers of their sexuality, with negative reinforcement for sexual activity. Hlavka (2014), in her research around norms that perpetuate sexual violence, found that adolescents were likely to blame themselves for sexual violence, or accept it as a normal aspect of adolescence. The youth interviewed for Hlavka's research implied that the males around them couldn't help themselves, or that it was normal for them to act out in sexually coercive or aggressive ways. They often had to leverage their sexuality for access to resources such as transportation, alcohol, or social capital. They also noted that there were often negative consequences for them naming their experiences as sexual violence, with even their friends turning on them and labeling them "sluts" (p. 14).

Hlavka's research also references the concept of sexual scripts, which "mediate individuals' relationships and sexual interactions through social context and cultural commitments" (p. 5). That is, people develop understandings of how relationships and sexual interactions are "supposed to" go, and use that as a lens through which to understand their own behavior and the behavior of others. We learn these scripts through our interactions with others and watching others interact. We see "normal" or "typical" relationships on TV and in movies. We garner our ideas of what is romantic, sexy, and desirable through these mediums as well, and these norms are then enforced through peer groups that punish deviancy through teasing and banishment.

Most people would agree that media literacy is important. Yet, the "why" often remains unquestioned or unspoken.



Broadly, it demands of people the ability to interpret messages from ambiguous content and see the cultural assumptions and norms behind those messages.



Media literacy should be part of ongoing discussions about boundaries, consent, and identifying what you want and how to ask for it.

Ward (2003) outlines three theoretical models that can be used to explain how sexual scripts are transmitted to consumers through the media: social learning theory, cultivation theory, and priming theory. Social learning theory works with the concept of modeling, whereby a behavior is seen and then either repeated or not repeated based on a number of variables, including whether the action is received well by others, whether the action fits into the person's moral schema, and the attractiveness of the modeler, among other things. Cultivation theory believes that through repeated exposure, one cultivates a belief system around the values portrayed in media, and thus assimilates these values into their own system. Priming theory suggests that media exposure leaves us more open to encoding information related to what we've recently been exposed to, and therefore internalizing the messages. However, all of these are mediated by a number of different factors that influence our belief structures, including our age, gender, cultural background, etc.

Reichert, Latour, Lambiase, & Adkins (2007), exposed college-aged people to ten minutes of the movie *Dreamworlds II*, and measured their receptiveness of sexist imagery in advertising. While this was a relatively short exposure to media criticism, it impacted women's views of the sexist advertising, as opposed to a control group who watched a Grand Canyon tourism video. Similarly, Pinkleton, Austin, Cohen, Chen, & Fitzgerald (2008) found that a peer-led media literacy class increased high school-aged youths' ability to recognize sexual messaging in media and apply this knowledge to their own behavior. Having the ability to recognize, and therefore compare, the literal scripts of media—television, film, music videos, magazines, and beyond—to their own internalized scripts seems to influence one's ability to make more informed decisions regarding sex and sexuality, and resist insidious messaging around violence and sexism.

We live in a world where media is omnipresent, and this media is specifically created to affect us. While parents may have influence in a child's life, there is little doubt that peer groups and other role models have an extremely large effect, as well. Successful movie stars, athletes, moguls, artists, and political figures model what it takes to be successful, and also what success and power can give a person. This is not to say that media can't be a useful or even positive influence, but it's important that people are able to critically analyze what their values are, and make conscious choices about what messages they want to take in and which they want to reject. Media literacy should be a part of ongoing discussions about boundaries, consent, and identifying what you want and how to ask for it. It is an extension of our conceptualizing healthy relationships with others and with ourselves.

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## Media Bias and Sexual Assault Narratives

Joshua Daniel Phillips, Southern Illinois University

**T**he media are never neutral. Instead, all media are created through biases, agendas, and partiality. This does not mean that all media bias is intentional; only that media bias exists. To highlight this, let us look at the news.

When debating “media bias,” overt examples include cable news. While relevant, I think about “media bias” in more nuanced terms. Mainly, bias happens every time media make a choice. For example, CNN might provide 24-hour coverage about a tornado in Kansas while providing no coverage about a tsunami in Indonesia. The defense is that the tornado is more relevant to CNN’s viewers. While true, CNN still made the choice to cover the tornado at the expense of not covering the tsunami. This is the definition of bias: showing favoritism to one story over another. This does not mean that CNN’s coverage is “bad” or “deceitful,” rather CNN has to make programming choices based on time constraints and relevance. The fact that all media constantly make these types of inclusive/exclusive decisions forms the foundation of inherent media bias.

Knowing that media make choices about what we view is important because media are powerful sources that shape cultural narratives and influence beliefs. In regard to sexual violence, we should think about if sexual violence is being talked about, how sexual violence is being talked about, and who is talking about sexual violence in the media. Today, my concern is that convicted rapist and former boxer Mike Tyson is influencing cultural narratives and beliefs about sexual violence without being challenged.

In the past few years, Tyson has made a pop culture comeback. He has had multiple cameos in The Hangover movies, performed a Broadway show about his life, wrote a bestselling book, provided endless television interviews, and even threw out the first pitch at a Pirates’ game on April 17. While he is twenty-years removed from his rape conviction and free to promote his talents, his vast exposure and sole ability to control the narrative about whether or not he raped Desiree Washington is problematic.



By allowing a convicted rapist to control larger narratives about sexual violence, survivors' voices are marginalized as less important and less relevant.

Through these public appearances, Tyson is provided platforms for telling his version of events (he claims that a rape never happened) and given the opportunity to recreate his image in the public imagination. This allows Tyson to achieve two objectives. First, seeing the new, fun-loving, humorous Tyson may cause some people to question the rape conviction. For example, "Tyson is so funny and caring now. I can't imagine this new Tyson ever raping someone. Maybe that rape conviction was a lie after all." Second, for those under the age of 30, Tyson's rape conviction happened well-before their conscious memories of major news events. Therefore, Tyson's public appearances allow him to shape an untainted image of himself for an entire generation. This could lead to statements such as "Mike Tyson was so funny in *The Hangover*. Did you know this guy said he was wrongfully convicted of rape? I believe him."

Of course, it is in Tyson's interest to tell his version of the rape conviction as often as possible to as many people as possible. And in all honesty, who can blame him? However, by allowing the "new" Tyson to control the narrative about his rape conviction, the media simultaneously marginalizes other narratives about his rape conviction: mainly the views of Desiree Washington.

As some argue, Washington doesn't want to be interviewed. Of course, why would she after she was vilified? Without Washington there are still two ways the media could remedy this situation so Tyson doesn't have complete control over the sexual assault narrative. First, the media could provide equal time for the views of Washington's supporters, former prosecutors, or anti-gender violence advocates. Second, the media could decide not to interview Tyson unless alternative perspectives are heard. Without alternative voices, Tyson is allowed to keep saying "Every girl knows what a guy wants when she comes to his room at two in the morning." Unchallenged, these victim-blaming statements become acceptable excuses for the viewing public.

The lesson is this: access to voice matters. Currently Tyson has unlimited access to use his voice and the media is willing to share his story. In contrast, Washington's voice has no platform. On a larger scale, this disproportionate representation does more than silence Washington. By allowing a convicted rapist to control larger narratives about sexual violence, survivors' voices are marginalized as less important and less relevant. What message do we send survivors when CNN gives Tyson a platform to say hateful things about Washington and gives no time to an anti-sexual violence educator to defend the narratives of survivors? What message do we send to survivors when we make Tyson's new book a *New York Times* bestseller, but don't support the written narratives of sexual assault survivors? Finally, what message do we send young boys when Tyson says "she wanted it because she came to my room" and no one offers a different message about consent?

The media will always be bias. It chooses what voices to amplify and what voices to silence. But that doesn't mean that we don't have power. We can demand more voices be heard, we can provide students with more resources, and we can financially support survivors' narratives by purchasing their books, watching their movies, and attending their Broadway shows. Tyson currently controls the narrative about his rape conviction. We have an obligation to challenge this narrative.

*Joshua Daniel Phillips is a Ph. D. Candidate. His research interests include rhetoric, pop culture, sexual violence, and sports. He is also a national speaker on sexual violence and the author of 1,800 Miles: Striving to End Sexual Violence, One Step at a Time.* ◆



The lesson is this:  
access to voice matters.



# Oasis Youth Center



Cathy Nguyen, Youth Advocate for Sexual Assault Prevention

## Oasis & Prevention

Oasis Youth Center, based in Tacoma, WA, enhances the health and well-being of LGBTQ youth by saving lives, building community, and developing young leaders who can change the world. Oasis is a youth-adult partnership in which young people and adults come together for shared teaching, learning, and action.

The Oasis Peer Education Network (O.P.E.N.!) is a group of youth who come together monthly with the goal of preventing sexual assault in the LGBTQ community. O.P.E.N.! explores the roots of violence in the queer community; engages in learning and dialogue about identity, culture, and healthy relationships; and builds skills in positive bystander intervention.

O.P.E.N.! follows a broader Oasis curriculum that focuses on healthy relationships, identity, life skills, and leadership. Our curriculum consists of workshops, events, trainings, and activities that focus on these themes in relation to sexual assault prevention. O.P.E.N.! explores a range of topics, including: intersectional identity, privilege and oppression, consent, power and control dynamics in relationships, and body image.

## Exploring Sexual Violence & Media

In March 2014, O.P.E.N.! led a media literacy workshop that centered on gender violence and sexism in mainstream hip hop. The topic was chosen because many Oasis youth illustrate strong interest in hip hop culture—particularly, hip hop music and dance—and those who regularly participate in O.P.E.N.! have shared their passion for poetry, spoken word, and break dancing. Thirteen Oasis youth members, including an Oasis

intern, participated in the workshop. Participants represented a variety of gender identities and racial/ethnic backgrounds.

For the media literacy workshop, youth watched two video clips from Byron Hurt's *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* documentary. One clip focusing on the idea of manhood/masculinity and another focusing on gender violence in mainstream hip hop. The group identified major components of mainstream masculinity: being tough, having sexual dominance over women, and rejecting anything feminine or "woman-like", which led into a conversation about how sexism and homophobia relate to sexual assault. Focusing on the hip-hop industry also helped the group to explore capitalism by looking at what sort of ideas and images are sold through media. In addition, the group discussed the controversy around if/when it is "okay" to use specific derogatory terms and what it means to re-appropriate or reclaim words.

Following the viewing of the documentary, O.P.E.N.! listened to and read the lyrics of a song called, "The Queen Is Dead" by Bambu, which explores the concept of benevolent sexism. Youth engaged in a discussion about chivalry and made distinctions between doing "kind" things and advocating for social justice. From this exploration, the group talked about examples of "benevolent homophobia," such as sayings like, "I don't care if he's gay—he just better not get 'weird' around me."

The O.P.E.N.! media literacy workshop provided valuable opportunities for the group to learn and talk about the roots of sexual assault—specifically, how identity, culture, and systems relate to sexual

violence in the LGBTQ community. Additionally, youth explored how hip-hop has evolved over the decades and how its culture has been shaped by poverty, racism, and the displacement of communities of color.

Through examining popular culture, youth are able to break down what is shown in media and where certain messages come from. In doing that, it becomes easier to talk about the ideas and actions that contribute to sexual violence. Media literacy also encourages youth to exercise their power as consumers and to influence change through what they choose to or choose not to purchase.

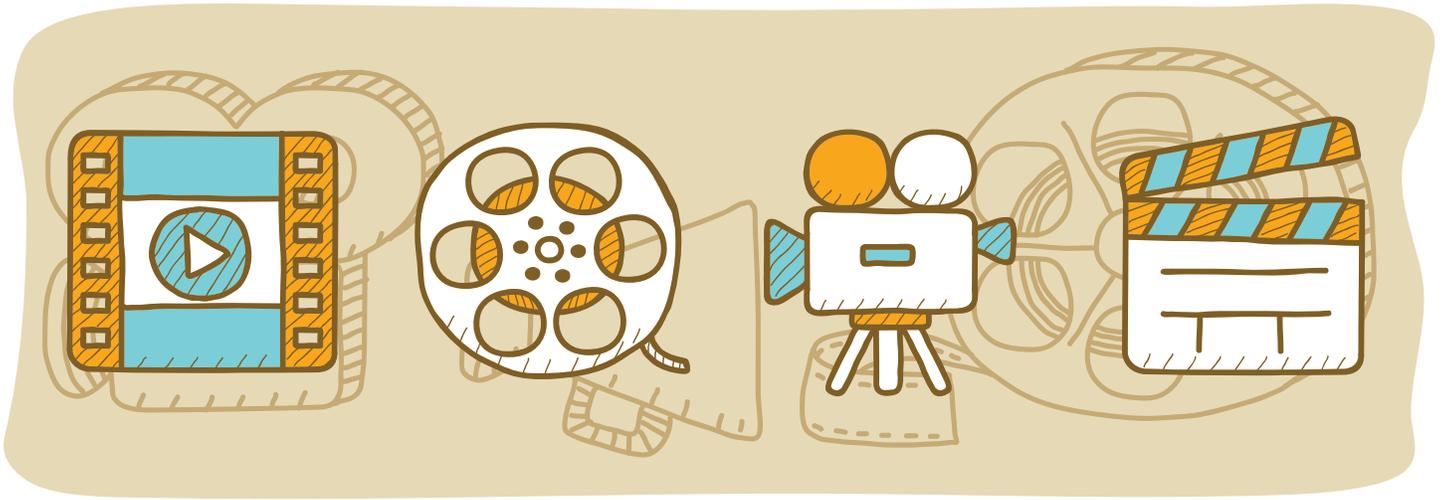
### OASIS

Oasis is a drop-in and resource center for LGBTQ youth ages 14-24 and is the only queer youth center in Pierce County. Oasis' mission is to enhance and sustain the health and well-being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth by saving individual lives, building community, and developing young leaders who can change the world. Oasis is a youth-adult partnership in which young people and adults come together for shared teaching, action, and learning. To learn more about Oasis, visit their website: [www.oasisyouthcenter.org](http://www.oasisyouthcenter.org). For more information about prevention work at Oasis, you can contact Cathy at [cathy@oasisyouthcenter.org](mailto:cathy@oasisyouthcenter.org)

*Cathy Nguyen is the Youth Advocate for Sexual Assault Prevention at Oasis. She received her BASW in Social Work from the University of Washington-Tacoma in 2013 and is actively involved in the Tacoma community. Cathy volunteers as a support group facilitator at BRIDGES, a center for grieving youth and their families, and spends her time working on a variety of photography and literary projects and publications. She is a creative thinker, an avid writer of songs and stories, and seeks to create positive social change through art and community-building.* ◆

### Media Literacy Workshop Tips & Tricks

- Have everyone introduce themselves. A standard practice at Oasis is inviting everyone to share their preferred gender pronoun in addition to their name. This helps to create an inclusive environment right from the beginning.
- As a group, come up with ground rules for the workshop. These rules would help to provide a safe and supportive environment for engaging in discussion and activities.
- At Oasis, we start workshops with an icebreaker that connects to the main topics. O.P.E.N.! did an "About Me" cipher in which youth engaged in interjectional, verbal sharing that mimicked rapping with one another.
- At the beginning of the workshop, leaders encourage members to take care of themselves throughout the session. This means stepping out of the room when conversation sets off any difficult triggers, etc. Trained staff and volunteers (who are not facilitating) are available to meet with youth if they need.
- Create a system for group communication throughout the workshop. O.P.E.N.! utilizes the practice of "Oops, Ouch, Snap," which helps participants to convey a need to create space for specific conversation. This is a simple and non-confrontational method that creates a safe space for sharing:
  - ◆ "Ouch," may be used when someone says something that offends you or makes you feel uncomfortable;
  - ◆ "Oops," may be used in response to "ouch" and/or when something you shared may not have been perceived positively;
  - ◆ "Snap" is using your fingers to snap and show your agreement/excitement for something someone just said.
- Present a variety of media for discussion that is relevant to the group (e.g. video clips, music, magazines).



## PREVENTION RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

# Sex, Gender Norms, and Pornography: Examining the film Don Jon

Kat Monusky & Mika Semrow  
Prevention Resource Center

**R**ecently some of the Prevention Resource Center staff got together to watch and discuss the movie *Don Jon*. While watching it we began to wonder... Are they making insightful and poignant commentary on sexism, homophobia, and other aspects of rape culture? Regardless of whether or not the message was intentional, we think it's a great way to draw people into prevention conversations. We created a Prevention Discussion & Activity Guide to make the connection to underlying causes of sexual violence in the film; drawing on examples of male entitlement, over sexualized portrayals of women in media, rigid gender roles, and the objectification of women.

The guide contains considerations for facilitators, a summary of the film, tips for framing the discussion, key points to highlight, topical discussion questions, and group activities. The guide is available as a separate resource on our website: <http://www.wcsap.org/discussion-activity-guide-film-don-jon>.



We enjoyed watching and discussing the film and hope our Discussion & Activity Guide can be another tool to add to your toolbox. WCSAP members can check out a copy of the *Don Jon* movie from our library!

## Note to Facilitators: Considerations before Beginning

This film contains graphic images of sex and pornography and has a MPAA rating of R. This means this film is designed for a more mature audience and may not be suitable for those under the age of 17. Please consider this when scheduling a viewing or incorporating into a prevention program. As always, review the film before hosting a viewing and discussion.

This film has overt sexual themes and the discussion following will encourage talking openly about sex, sexuality, gender roles, and social pressures or norms related to all of these. We recommend creating a set of group agreements to establish expectations of respectful dialogue during the discussion and activity.

These can be challenging conversations to have with a group and some participants may be

uncomfortable engaging. Respecting participants' boundaries without silencing folks who want to talk about their own experiences can be a tenuous balance. Additionally, it's important to acknowledge the specific sub-group portrayed in the film, and how stereotypes are often problematic. For example, "Guido" is a term that is often considered offensive by Italian American people and also sensationalized in pop-culture, so addressing and challenging this language is important.

While sexual violence is not explicitly portrayed in this film, it is important to be aware that disclosures may occur. Make sure resources are available for those who may be triggered by the conversation, and be prepared to handle disclosures either in the large group or one-on-one.

### Summary of the Film

Don Jon follows Jon, or Jonny, (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), whose character mimics the stereotypical "Jersey Shore"-type guy: he cares about his family, his car, his apartment, his friends, his appearance, and having fun. He goes out on the weekends to pick up women and never really engages in relationships.

The problem is, having sex with the women he meets in bars is never really as satisfying as watching porn—something Jon does 20-30 times a week. Jon explains that real women always want to have sex in the missionary position so they can look him in the eye and they expect reciprocity during sex, will not perform oral sex on him without expecting oral sex in return. In short, Jon is bored with sex with another person because, unlike porn, he does not "lose himself" in it and real women don't act like porn stars.

He thinks this will change when he meets Barbara (Scarlett Johansson), who he and his friends call "a dime." Barbara expects more than just a one-night stand, and they end up dating and falling in love. She pushes him to change his life by returning to school and introducing her to his friends and family. When she discovers that he watches porn she gets extremely upset, prompting him to lie and

say he never does it. He then begins to hide it and is caught by Esther (Julianne Moore) who is in his night class with him. Unlike the other people in his life, Esther does not seem fazed by Jon's porn watching—instead, she gives him a porn film that she says is better than what he watches. Also unlike other people, Esther is not in opposition to porn in general, but says the porn he watches is not realistic.

When Barbara checks Jon's browser history and finds that he does indeed watch porn, and often, she breaks up with him, calling him sick. Jon then returns to his old life, and at the next night class, has sex with Esther in her car. During their conversation, she pushes him to think about why he enjoys porn so much. Because of her questioning, he realizes he is unable to masturbate without visual stimulation from porn, and finds her again to talk about it. Esther tells Jon he cannot "lose himself" during real sex because unlike porn, sex is intimate and needs to be reciprocal. After Jon finds her crying, Esther discloses that her husband and son had died a year before and she and Jon have sex where they are both clearly emotionally invested. After this, Jon begins to engage in a meaningful and reciprocal relationship with Esther and it appears he ends his relationship with pornography.

## Key Points

Below we highlight some of the significant scenes and language from the film you will want to integrate into the discussion to help participants make the connection to underlying root causes of sexual violence.

Jon finds porn more satisfying than real sex because it's only about him. Real sex doesn't live up to the fantasy presented in porn: that it's only about male desire and pleasure.

Jon's list of interests reflects his views on entitlement and ownership over women's bodies and sex by listing them with the object: his body, his pad, his ride, his "girls", and his porn.

Jon and his friends use language that allows them to see women as objects and distance themselves emotionally. They rate women's attractiveness on a scale of 1 to 10, compete for sexual conquests, and use language such as "smash" in reference to sex.

The theme of women as objects is also present in the ways in which Jon and his father describe when they found their romantic partners. Jon repeatedly refers to Barbara as "the most beautiful thing" he has ever seen and Jon's father tells a story of meeting his mother and saying "that's mine".

Jon adheres strictly to traditional masculinity through an extremely meticulous routine. Every Sunday Jon is shown with severe road rage while on his way to church. There, he confesses to his premarital sex and porn consumption, of which he keeps meticulous count. He then says his Hail Mary's at the gym. He also has a weekly meal with his family.

The movie asserts that romance movies act in similar ways to porn, in that they create unrealistic expectations of love and relationships, and assign very particular gender roles to relationships ("he would give up everything for her").

Much of the movie contains commentary on the ways in which porn harms Jon, and this is reinforced through value-based statements from Barbara. Esther's critique relies on the limitations of the messages and roles in the porn he consumes and balances that with the possibility not all porn is created with these messages.

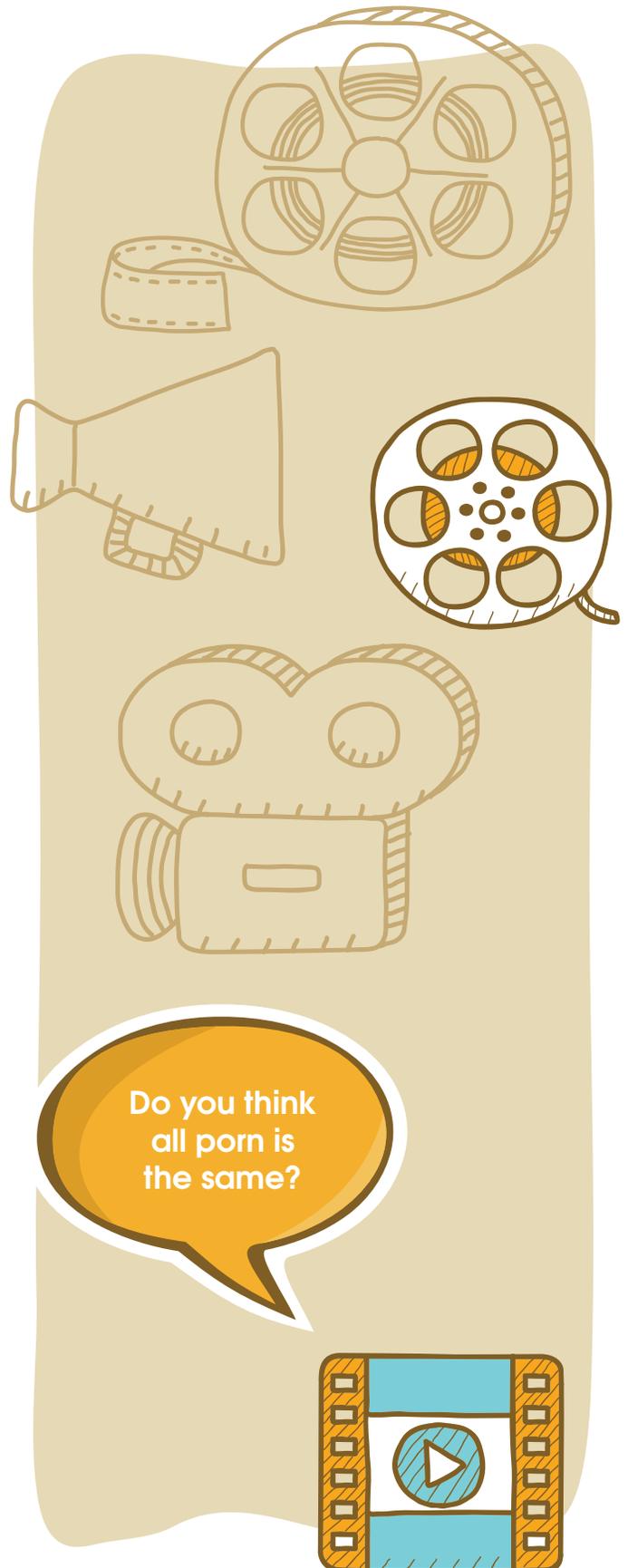
Towards the end of the film, Jon develops empathy towards Esther and they engage in an intimate conversation. After this, Jon's connection with Esther leads to a more satisfying emotional & sexual relationship. It appears to have ripple effects across other aspects of his life.

## Framing the Discussion

These questions may help provide a framework for the movie that brings the aspects you'd like to focus on to the group's consciousness. Depending on group dynamics, it may be more helpful to discuss these out loud or to have group members write about them privately.

This would also be a good time to lay out group expectations and agreements that foster respect and comfort with one another. This will help prepare the group to engage in the framing conversation with an open mind about respecting different values and opinions.

- What is your personal opinion on porn? Why do you feel that way?
  - ▶ **Note to Facilitators:** push for concrete reasoning, not just "it's gross"
- Do you think all porn is the same?
  - ▶ What if porn were to portray only realistic bodies having realistic sex?
  - ▶ In what other ways do we idealize unrealistic images in our culture? Is this better or worse than porn?
- How do you think porn influences people's sexual relationships?
  - ▶ How do you think the other idealized unrealistic images mentioned above influence people's sexual relationships?
- How do you think men are socialized to view sex and relationships? What do they value in partners, and what do they expect out of their partners?
  - ▶ How are women socialized to view sex and relationships? What do they value in partners, and what do they expect out of their partners?
  - ▶ Where do these things align, and where do they differ?
  - ▶ Do these views and expectations change?
- When it comes to sex, how do couples negotiate sex and sexual boundaries? Is that ever portrayed in porn?
- How do you think porn or porn consumption contributes to sexual violence?



## Discussion Questions

### Sex

- Do you think Jon enjoyed sex at the beginning of the movie?
- He says that he can “lose himself” in porn, but not during real sex. What does the movie identify as the reason?
  - ▶▶ What are some possible alternative reasons?
  - ▶▶ **Note to facilitators:** some answers may include anxiety around not meeting other people’s desires/expectations, not having his desires/expectations met; anxiety around his own body image; performance anxiety; self-fulfilling prophecy that sex will never be as good as porn; desire to control every aspect of his life, like his apartment, car, etc..
- What are some ways he could work through these issues?
  - ▶▶ **Note to Facilitators:** Some answers may include: talking about his expectations and desires, and moving slowly to make sure he doesn’t feel pressured to move straight to sexual intercourse.
- Do you think the women he was sleeping with at the beginning enjoyed it?
- Do you think he enjoyed it at the end?
- Do you think Esther enjoyed it at the end?
- There is a scene in the movie where Barbara convinces Jon to go to night school while rubbing up against him in the hallway of her apartment building. Do you think she was really interested in sex with him in that moment?
  - ▶▶ If not, what was the purpose or goal of her using sex in that moment?
  - ▶▶ Do you think that was appropriate?
  - ▶▶ What could she have done instead?
- Outside of the above scenario, how else is sex used as a tactic of control?
- Is consent obtained at any point in the film?
  - ▶▶ **Note to facilitators:** Give a brief definition of consent, if needed.
- Are sexual desires negotiated at any time in the film, consciously/verbally or unconsciously/nonverbally?
  - ▶▶ What assumptions does he make about his sexual partners’ desires?
  - ▶▶ **Note to facilitators:** It may be helpful to refer back to certain assertions in the film about Barbara being too attractive to have to give oral sex, saying that he has to give oral sex in order to receive it, or assuming that they will not want to have sex in positions other than missionary.
- Was there any sexual violence portrayed in the movie? If so, how and against who?

### Relationships

- Do you think Jon enjoyed his relationship with Barbara? How do you know?
- Do you think Jon’s relationship with Barbara is healthy?
- Was there equal power in Jon and Barbara’s relationship?
  - ▶▶ In what ways did the characters exert power over one another?
- When Barbara looks at his browser history and they fight about his lying, he says that they had sex whenever she wanted to. What does this say about the power dynamic in the relationship and Jon’s involvement in it?
- Do you think Jon enjoyed his relationship with Esther?
- Do you think Jon’s relationship with Esther is realistic?
  - ▶▶ Who has the power in that relationship, or is it equal?

Was there equal power in Jon and Barbara's relationship?

## Discussion Questions

### Gender Roles

- What do you think the sister's significance was to the story?
  - ▶▶ How did her silent presence add to the film? What do we learn about her character through the one line she has in the film?
  - ▶▶ How does her femininity compare with Barbara and Esther's?
- How is masculinity enforced in the film?
  - ▶▶ **Note to Facilitators:** Answers may include homophobic slurs, by questioning how much Jon values traditionally masculine things like football, through "tough love."

### Objectification of Women

- When in the film did you notice objectification?
- When was it absent?
  - ▶▶ **Note to facilitators:** Some points you could bring up here are his use of "most beautiful thing I ever saw" when talking about Barbara, his father telling the story about how he met Jon's mother and saying "she's mine." The rating of attractiveness, not getting any girls' names, instead labeling them by physical characteristics. Listing girls on the same level as his physical appearance, his apartment, his car, etc.
- During several scenes media was shown (the burger advertisement, the movie posters, porn clips, and romance film clips). What messages did the media portray, and in what ways are they reflective of the relationships in the movie?
  - ▶▶ **Note to facilitators:** The burger advertisement and porn clips are all real, and not manufactured for the film. The burger advertisement showed a highly sexualized woman in a bikini, with the tagline, speaking about the burger, saying it is "not just a piece of meat," implying that the woman is, in contrast.
- At one point, Jon's friend says that "Twos and Threes are open-minded ladies." What do you think this means?
- How did Jon's relationship with his father contribute to his beliefs and attitudes toward women and sex?

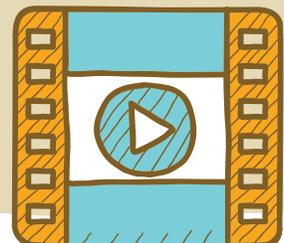
### Community & Societal Influence

- During one confession, Jon attempts to explain to the priest how his sex with Esther was "different," and was confused by receiving the same penance. What do you think about this?
  - ▶▶ Is all premarital sex the same or is it more moral when there's an emotional connection?
  - ▶▶ Should quality of sex be a factor?
- Jon is portrayed as a "Jersey Shore" stereotype. Does this stereotype make it easy for us to dismiss these issues as not being universal?
  - ▶▶ In what ways do you think Jon's situation is relevant to the wider society?

### Porn

- How did Jon's porn habits influence his real-life sexuality?
- Do you think watching porn can be healthy?
  - ▶▶ What makes it healthy vs. unhealthy?
- At one point in the movie, Jon compares watching porn with watching romantic movies. What do you think about this? Do you agree/disagree?
- When Esther brings him Danish 70s porn to watch, she calls mainstream porn "fake." This unsettles Jon. Why might that be?
  - ▶▶ **Note to Facilitators:** An answer could be that he realizes he's potentially built an ideal sexual scenario based off of simulated sex. He wants to believe that it can be like that in real life.

Do you think watching porn can be healthy?



## "Act-Like-A-Man" Box Activity

### Materials:

Blackboard, dry-erase board, or flip chart paper and markers or chalk.

### Film Scenes to Draw From:

- The priorities Jon lists in the beginning of the movie.
- The rating system of women and the competition for sexual conquests.
- The Carl's Jr. burger ads, where it says "more than just a piece of meat."
- Jon's assertion that Barbara is the "most beautiful thing I've ever seen."
- Jon's father's proclamation about Jon's mother "I saw her and said, 'that's mine.'"
- Physical fighting with friends and homophobic put-downs (calling one another a "faggot" for thinking his girlfriend isn't the most attractive woman).
- Dinner scenes with Jon's family

\* Adapted for the film *Don Jon*



### Activity:

When possible, have the group refer back to the movie to highlight the differences between expectations and reality. A good consideration is to let folks come to conclusions that make sense to them on their own; the more the group is engaged with one another, the better.

1. Draw a person surrounded by a circle.
2. Ask the group what Jon thinks it means to be a man. Write their responses on the inside of the circle.
3. Ask the group what Jon's community (church, parents, friends, etc.) thinks about what it means to be a man. Write the responses on the outside edges of the circle.
4. Ask the group whether these values line up or not.
5. Ask whether these values align with their own.
6. Draw another person next to Jon.
7. Ask what Jon (and his community) thinks about what it means to be a woman at the beginning of the movie and write the group's responses on the inside of the circle. Talk for a bit about examples from the movie.
8. Ask the group whether these values align.
9. Look over the two boxes and ask what is the same and what is different?
10. Ask how these beliefs may have changed for Jon over time.
11. Ask how these beliefs may have influenced Jon's sexual relationships over time.

### Follow-Up Questions:

- What does Jon think about manhood/what it means to be a man?
  - ▶▶ What does Jon's community think about this?
  - ▶▶ How do you know? Can you give me an example?
- In what ways are these similar or different?
- How do you think these attitudes influenced Jon's relationship to his sexuality/sexual relationships?
- How do you think these attitudes influenced Jon's non-sexual relationships?
- What do Jon and his community think about what it means to be a woman at the beginning of the movie?
- How does Jon think about women at the end of the movie?
  - ▶▶ How do you know?
  - ▶▶ Can you give me an example?
- What do you think about these categories? Are men and women exclusive categories, or are their overlapping characteristics?
  - ▶▶ In what ways are these categories helpful?
  - ▶▶ In what ways are they harmful?
- With these notions of masculine and feminine roles/attitudes in mind, do you think Jon would ask for things he wants?
  - ▶▶ Does he do this when it comes to sex?

## QUESTION OPPRESSION



### Exploring the Connections Between Sexual Violence & Oppression

Use these questions to explore the connections between sexual violence and oppression with staff, volunteers, or board members. Try discussing one or more at a staff meeting, in-service, volunteer training, or board retreat.

In what ways is your media literacy work affected by the community you work with and the genre of media?

How do intersections of oppression (ability, size, race, gender--including trans\* people--sexuality, etc.) show up in media? How are these people's sexualities portrayed in media?

Mainstream media often disparages, mocks, and erases the bodies of people who experience oppression; how does this impact them and how does this impact your prevention work with them?

## PREVENTION RESOURCES



WCSAP members have access to check out our library materials through the mail. Browse the catalog online! Questions can be directed to [library@wcsap.org](mailto:library@wcsap.org).

**Type:** Recorded Webinar  
**Media & Technology in Sexual Violence Prevention (2012)**  
<http://www.wcsap.org/webinar-media-technology-sexual-violence-prevention>

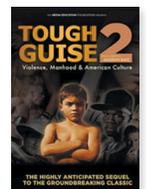
Media and technology offer essential tools to advance prevention efforts. What are best practices for their use and what are alternatives for individuals without ready access to these tools? This webinar explores social media like the old standbys, Facebook and Twitter, plus newer and genre-specific sites; technology from flip phones to geotrackers; media from movies to magazines. Learn how to promote positive, healthy behavior using media and technology at any skill level.

**Examining a Culture of Slut Shaming (2013)**  
<http://www.wcsap.org/examining-slut-shaming-webinar>  
This webinar offers a discussion around the culture of slut shaming among youth, and the impact this culture has on youth survivors of sexual assault/abuse. It explores this issue through a lens of an anti-oppression framework, considering the ways the movement against slut shaming have and have not been inclusive of marginalized groups.

**Type:** DVD  
**Killing Us Softly 4 (2010)**  
This updated version of the popular film challenges a new generation of students to take advertising seriously, and to think critically about popular culture and its relationship to sexism, eating disorders, and gender violence.



**Tough Guise 2: Violence, Manhood, and American Culture (2013)**  
This updated film provides a look at the violent, sexist, and homophobic messages boys and young men routinely receive from virtually every corner of the culture, from television, movies, video games, and advertising to pornography, the sports culture, and US political culture.



**Type:** Video Blogs  
**Reel Grrls**  
<https://www.youtube.com/user/reelgrrls>  
Reel Grrls is a non-profit program that empowers girls to critique media images and to create their own films! As media plays such an influential role in our global society, we believe that if women and girls are to achieve equality and advancement in today's world they must be taught to be media literate.



**Feminist Frequency**  
<http://www.feministfrequency.com/>  
Feminist Frequency is a video webseries that explores the representations of women in pop culture narratives. The video series was created by Anita Sarkeesian in 2009 and largely serves as an educational resource to encourage critical media literacy and provide resources for media makers to improve their works of fiction.





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