

CHALLENGING SEXIST MYTHS

- ✓ 1. To challenge myths about women - their roles and value in society.
- ✓ 2. To help learners interpret historical and contemporary views on gender.
- ✓ 3. To create awareness of how sexist attitudes are perpetuated.

45 min - 1 hour

Quotes worksheet & Teacher answer key (provided)

PROCEDURE

PRIOR TO CLASS

- 1 Print Quotes worksheet (provided here). Make enough copies, in order that an individual quote can be allocated to each learner (even if quotes are repeated).

IN CLASS

- 2 Explain to the class that sexist beliefs or myths (ideas or stories that are not true) which marginalise women, have been perpetuated over time. This effectively makes politically created gender inequalities seem natural. Because society has upheld these myths, we assume that they are true. Those who do not interrogate myths, argue that: 'it is this way because it has always been this way'. However, these myths, like any others, are socially created and persist over time because we perpetuate them. We can only challenge these myths if we are able to identify them. This is the purpose of this exercise.

Examples of sexist myths:

- Women are not in positions of decision-making because they don't want to be.
- If abused women don't leave their partners, it is because they want to be abused/there is something wrong with them.
- Women who are raped did something wrong.
- Boys are better at maths and science.
- Jokes that degrade women are funny; if women do not find them funny they are prudish or stuck-up or kill-joys.
- There are no women in history books because they didn't do anything. Women like staying at home with children.
- A woman's worth is dependent on her being able to find a man to marry.

- 3 Hand out quote strips, at least one per learner (it's okay if more than one learner has the same quote).

- 4 Have learners take turns reading the quote aloud to the class.

- 5 Ask the reader and then the class, to explain the quote in their own words. Then facilitate discussion using the following prompts:

- a. What do you think the singer/poet/philosopher is saying?
- b. Do you agree with it?
- c. Does anyone else have a quote that they think says the same thing, and has a similar meaning?
- d. Read it out.
- e. How are they similar?

In this way learners should be able to identify common myths within the different quotes. Once you have dealt with one group of quotes, and their common myth/meaning, ask another learner to read their quote and repeat the process.

This activity covers most of the following myths:

- Women who are valued are married.
- Women are valued because they bear children.
- Women are only valued for their beauty.
- Women are not as intelligent as men.
- Women don't know what they want.
- Women are the possessions of men.
- It is acceptable/normal for men to use threats, coercion or violence on the women they love, or are in a relationship with.
- Women invite sex. Women are sexually deviant.

Refer to Teacher Tips for guidance on common themes/myths.

- 6 Now ask the class what difficulties women might face in trying to challenge the myths? What mechanism does society use to prevent women from challenging these myths?

If learners are struggling here you may suggest

- The use or threat of violence for transgressing mythical ideals/roles. Shaming or name calling.
- Policies that oppress women. Policies that create dependence on men.
- Media images of ideal women vs. 'bad' women
- Social celebration of certain 'kinds' of women (e.g. there is a 'Mrs South Africa' pageant but not a 'Single Mothers South Africa' pageant).

- 7 To close, ask the class:

- a. Were you surprised by the underlying messages of the quotes?
- b. Have you noticed these myths/messages before?
- c. Given that the quotes are taken from everyday texts and songs, over a period of time, why don't we notice the myths in them?
- d. What do you think is the effect when men and women get these messages from so many different sources, all the time?
- e. How can we challenge sexist myths?

TEACHER TIPS



General

This exercise provides a safe space to identify and challenge pervasive sexist views that marginalise women from religious, cultural and political perspectives. The teacher should facilitate the exercise in such a way that the learners respect each other's cultural, religious and personal values when discussing their opinions, but that ultimately exposes these views as untrue/myths.

For example in part ⑤ d. of the Discussion, the teacher can also have the learners provide counter-narratives to the myths. For example, when asking learners if this myth is true: "A woman's worth is dependent on her being able to find a man to marry", the teacher can ask learners to provide real life examples which falsify the myth.



Making the Link with Gender & Violence

These myths portray women as helpless, worthless, or only valuable in their utility to men. In this way they demean women, and promote violence against them.



Assessment Ideas

Option A

The discussion component of the exercise allows the teacher to assess critical thinking skills of learners.

Option B

Part ⑦ d. could be done as a written exercise.

Option C

A written exercise can be set where learners are asked to choose a popular song and analyse the lyrics along the lines of the class discussion.



QUOTES SHEET

You're so contagious, I can't take it, have my baby,
let's just make it.

- Jay-Z, *Excuse Me Miss* (2002)

"It is the law of nature that woman should be held
under the dominance of man."

- Confucius (551BC—479 BC)

"Her voice was ever soft, / Gentle, and low,—an
excellent thing in woman."

- William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

You change your mind/Like a girl changes clothes/
Yeah, you, PMS/Like a bitch

- Katy Perry, *'Hot n Cold'* (2008)

"Most women have no characters at all."

- Alexander Pope (1688–1744)

"A proper wife should be as obedient as a slave."

- Aristotle (384 BC- 322 BC)

My girl's got a big mouth/With which she blabbers a
lot/She laughs at most everything/Whether it's funny
or not

- Weezer, *No One Else* (1994)

She's not a saint, and she's not what you think/She's
an actress, whoa/She's better known for the things
that she does/On the mattress, whoa

- Taylor Swift, *Better than Revenge* (2010)

Pretty girls, sunshine in the air, perfume everywhere /
Girls are everywhere, pretty girls / Ugly girls be quiet,
quiet, pretty girls clap, clap like this

- Wale, *Pretty girls* (2009)

"I'm gonna make you a girl/Hey little hey little hey
little tomboy/Now let's put a dress on and wear a
little makeup/Whew!/You make a beautiful girl."

- The Beach Boys, *Hey Little Tomboy* (1976)

Sometimes I wish that I could stop you from talking
When I hear the silly things that you say

- Elvis Costello, *Alison* (1977)

"All the pursuits of men are the pursuits of women
also, but in all of them a woman is inferior to a man."

- Plato (428/27–348/47 B.C.)

"I hope she'll be a fool -- that's the best thing a girl
can be in this world, a beautiful little fool."

- F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925)

I wanna scream, I wanna dance / I need a hot girl / I
gotta feel / I gotta see.

- Hot Girl, *Dony* (2011)

"No woman is a genius; women are a decorative sex."

- Oscar Wilde (1854–1900)

'Don'tcha wish your girlfriend was hot like me?'

- Pussy Cat Dolls, *Don'tcha* (2005)

Good girl/I know you want it,/I know you want it/I
know you want it.

- Robin Thicke, *Blurred Lines* (2013)

Mebby [Maybe] to mean yes an' say no / Comes
natural to women.

- James Russell Lowell (1819–1891)

On her motorbike, the way she's riding it, riding it /
Wet lips to cigarette and now she's striking it, lighting
it / As she looks me in the eye, hell, she must know
she's inviting it

- INXS, *Hot Girls* (2006)

"Cause if you liked it then you should have put a ring
on it/If you liked it then you should've put a ring on it/
Don't be mad once you see that he want it/If you liked
it then you should've put a ring on it."

- Beyonce, *Single Ladies* (2011)

QUOTES SHEET

No matter what your always number one/My prized possession.

- Justin Bieber, *Favourite Girl* (2009)

"Her voice was ever soft, / Gentle, and low,—an excellent thing in woman."

- William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

"When a woman has scholarly inclinations there is usually something wrong with her sexual organs."

- Nietzsche (1844-1900)

"I don't need to try to control you/Look into my eyes and I'll own you."

- Maroon 5, *Moves Like Jagger* (2011)

"The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities; we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness."

- Aristotle (384 BC- 322 BC)

You can slap me in the face/You can scream profanity/Leave me here to die alone but/I'll still follow you home/I'll still follow you home.

- Nickelback - *Follow you Home* (2005)

"Nature intended women to be our slaves. They are our property...Women are nothing but machines for producing children."

- Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821)

You better run for your life if you can, little girl/Hide your head in the sand little girl/Catch you with another man/That's the end'a little girl.

- The Beatles, *Run for your Life* (1965)

"Take me, take me /Wanna be a victim /Ready for abduction"

- Katy Perry, *E.T.* (2010)

"When a woman has scholarly inclinations there is usually something wrong with her sexual organs."

- Nietzsche (1844-1900)

"Women should remain at home, sit still, keep house and bear children."

- Martin Luther, *On whose teaching the Lutheran Church is based* (1483-1546)

And if I had a girl she'd be the one to bear my child / Telling myself I'm a playa so I keep tryna shake it off / But I keep on seeing this big old house with a picket fence and a dog /Never felt nothing like this /Shes more than a mistress enough to handle my business / Now put that girl in my kitchen.

- R Kelly, *Pregnant* (2009)

When I first met you, you was a hoe / I tried to reform you, bomb you, warn you and teach you / But I couldn't reach you, you're still a hoe. Your father said you was a hoe.

- Bobby Digital (RZA) - *Domestic Violence* (1998)



TEACHER ANSWER KEY

The following table can help you prompt learners to find quotes with common meanings, or that communicate the same or similar myths. Do not share this with learners but use it as a reference for guiding the discussion. Quotes can be grouped according to the myth they communicate, in the following way:

<p>Women are not as intelligent as men.</p>	<p>“All the pursuits of men are the pursuits of women also, but in all of them a woman is inferior to a man.” - Plato (428/27–348/47 B.C.)</p> <p>“Most women have no characters at all.” - Alexander Pope (1688–1744)</p> <p>“No woman is a genius; women are a decorative sex.” - Oscar Wilde (1854–1900)</p> <p>“When a woman has scholarly inclinations there is usually something wrong with her sexual organs.” - Nietzsche (1844- 1900)</p> <p>“The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities; we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness.” - Aristotle (384 BC- 322 BC)</p>
<p>Women who are married are valued.</p>	<p>Cause if you liked it then you should have put a ring on it/If you liked it then you should've put a ring on it/Don't be mad once you see that he want it/If you liked it then you should've put a ring on it - Beyonce, Single Ladies (2011)</p>
<p>Women are valued because they bear children.</p>	<p>“Women should remain at home, sit still, keep house and bear children” - Martin Luther (On whose teaching the Lutheran Church is based) (1483–1546)</p> <p>And if I had a girl she'd be the one to bear my child /Telling myself I'm a playa so I keep tryna shake it off /But I keep on seeing this big old house with a picket fence and a dog /Never felt nothing like this /Shes more than a mistress enough to handle my business /Now put that girl in my kitchen - R Kelly, Pregnant (2009)</p> <p>You're so contagious, I can't take it, have my baby, let's just make it. - Jay-Z, Excuse Me Miss (2002)</p>
<p>Women are the possessions of men.</p>	<p>“Nature intended women to be our slaves*. They are our property...Women are nothing but machines for producing children.” - Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821)</p> <p>“It is the law of nature that woman should be held under the dominance of man.” - Confucius(551BC—479 BC)</p> <p>“A proper wife should be as obedient as a slave.” - Aristotle (384 BC- 322 BC)</p> <p>“I don't need to try to control you/Look into my eyes and I'll own you” - Maroon 5, Moves Like Jagger (2011)</p> <p>No matter what your always number one/My prized possession -Justin Bieber, Favourite Girl (2009)</p>
<p>Women should be seen and not heard</p>	<p>“Her voice was ever soft, / Gentle, and low,—an excellent thing in woman.” - William Shakespeare (1564–1616)</p> <p>Sometimes I wish that I could stop you from talking When I hear the silly things that you say - Elvis Costello - Alison (1977)</p>

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<p>Women are only valued for their beauty</p>	<p>"I'm gonna make you a girl/Hey little hey little hey little tomboy/Now let's put a dress on and wear a little makeup/Whew!/You make a beautiful girl" - The Beach Boys, Hey Little Tomboy (1976)</p> <p>"I hope she'll be a fool -- that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool." - F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (1925)</p> <p>Don'tcha wish your girlfriend was hot like me? - Pussy Cat Dolls, Don'tcha (2005)</p> <p>Pretty girls, sunshine in the air, perfume everywhere / Girls are everywhere, pretty girls / Ugly girls be quiet, quiet, pretty girls clap, clap like this - Wale, Pretty girls (2009)</p> <p>I wanna scream, I wanna dance / I need a hot girl / I gotta feel / I gotta see - Hot Girl, Dony (2011)</p>
<p>Women invite sex /are sexual objects</p>	<p>She's not a saint, and she's not what you think/She's an actress, whoa/She's better known for the things that she does/On the mattress, whoa - Taylor Swift, Better than Revenge (2010)</p> <p>When I first met you, you was a hoe / I tried to reform you, bomb you, warn you and teach you / But I couldn't reach you, you're still a hoe. Your father said you was a hoe - Bobby Digital (RZA) – Domestic Violence (1998)</p> <p>On her motorbike, the way she's riding it, riding it / Wet lips to cigarette and now she's striking it, lighting it / As she looks me in the eye, hell, she must know she's inviting it - INXS, Hot Girls (2006)</p>
<p>It is acceptable/normal for men to use threats, coercion or violence on the women they love or are in a relationship with.</p>	<p>You can slap me in the face/You can scream profanity/Leave me here to die alone but/I'll still follow you home/I'll still follow you home - Nickelback, Follow you home (2005)</p> <p>You better run for your life if you can, little girl/Hide your head in the sand little girl/Catch you with another man/That's the end'a little girl - The Beatles, Run for your life (1965)</p> <p>Take me, take me /Wanna be a victim /Ready for abduction" Katy Perry, E.T. (2010)</p>