



SESSION 7

Know Your Image

One of the primary goals of *Owning Up* is to help students learn how the messages they receive through the media influence how they value (or devalue) themselves. These messages also impact how they value others, including their peers, teachers, parents, and people they see in the media. This session begins the process of teaching media literacy, focusing not only on how students are being influenced to spend money on their image (a pair of shoes, a coat, the right cell phone), but also why that comes at the cost of their personal authenticity. It is critical when teaching this session not to make students feel like sellouts or fools for buying into these images. To avoid this, be clear that everyone is influenced in this way and stress that you want them to become aware of this influence so they can be more in control of their lives.

OBJECTIVES

- ✓ To help students understand the connection between buying into the culture and buying into what you need for your own self-image
- ✓ To encourage them to consider the importance of valuing people for who they are instead of what they have
- ✓ To encourage students to choose a more personally authentic style for themselves

MATERIALS

Chalkboard or flip chart
Magazines (an assortment of fashion and lifestyle periodicals)
Scissors, glue, poster board
Index cards

PREPARATIONS

If you have access to the Internet and a printer, students can go online to generate pictures of specific things they would like to buy.

Copy the situations for the “Parents and Style” activity on separate index cards if you wish.

SESSION OUTLINE

Review It

Review the assignments from the previous session and answer any questions students may have.

Set It Up

Ask students if they could choose any song, theme song, or sound effect to be their cell phone ring tone, what would it be? Write their answers on the chalkboard or flip chart.

Not everyone has the same ring tone. Your choice of ring tone is a personal matter and reflects your own personal style and image. That’s what this session is about.

I Want . . .

Remember the last time you were looking through a magazine, watching TV, or online and saw something you wanted to buy.

- ▶ What was it, and why did you want it?
- ▶ Describe what it physically feels like to want something.

Give out magazines, scissors, glue and poster board. Have students choose pictures of things they want to buy and create an individual collage. Use the collages to generate a discussion about students’ self-image and how they value others.

- ▶ What pictures did you choose for your collage?
- ▶ How do you think your life will change if you get the things you chose?
- ▶ What do your choices say about you?
- ▶ How does your collage compare to the ones your close friends made?
- ▶ Now look at the ring tones we put up on the board earlier. Where do they fit?

What’s in the Boy World Box?

Ask the following questions and discuss how self-presentation and style are ways in which guys (and girls) create the image they wish to project.

- ▶ What is your style?
- ▶ How do you display your style through clothes, hair, body piercing, and tattoos?
- ▶ What does your style say about you?
- ▶ Do your friends have a different style than you?
- ▶ Why do some people feel justified treating other people badly if they don't have the right clothes and gear?

To illustrate where various expressions of personal style fit in the culture, draw the Boy World diagram on the board and talk about what is and isn't in the box.

Buying In or Selling Out?

There's an enormous amount of pressure on adolescents to buy all this stuff and to have the "right style," however you define that. But what this really does is teach you to think that people are better if they have the right style and gear. On the flip side, it also teaches that people who don't have those things can be ridiculed for either not being cool enough or being too poor to keep up.

TRANSFORM YOUR IMAGE

In a world where people are constantly trying to make you focus on your outside image, let's refocus on our core self. Everyone needs a motto or mantra to help them concentrate on how they want to live their lives.

Share a few examples.

"Do what you're most afraid of."

"Dignity is not negotiable."

"I can be me without fear."

"Just because you can doesn't mean you should."

Give students a few minutes to think, then have them say their mottos or mantras aloud. Write them on a sheet of poster board for everyone to see. If students have trouble thinking of a motto or mantra, you can suggest that they go to the library after the session and find one there. They can share what they find at the next session.

Parents and Style

Ask students whether their parents understand how important their personal style is to them. (Most will moan and groan and tell you how awful it is.) To help students see the issue from a parent's perspective, discuss the following situations. If time permits, you could role-play one or more.

1. Your 12-year-old daughter starts wearing really sexy clothes. Do you say anything to her? What do you say?
2. Your 15-year-old son starts dressing, walking, and acting way tougher than he is. You're afraid that he may be buying too much into his image and thinking he has to prove himself if he's challenged. Do you say anything to him? What do you say?
3. You have a 13-year-old son who plays basketball and also loves theater and band. His friends on the team are teasing him and saying he can't be a jock and do theater and band at the same time. What advice would you give him?
4. Your daughter is begging you to buy her a pair of really expensive jeans. You know she wants them because all her friends have them and she won't feel like she'll fit in unless she has them. Do you get them for her? What if the only way you could pay for them is with a credit card that you already can't pay off?

Wrap It Up

Give students the opportunity to ask questions and comment on the session, then leave them with the following thoughts.

- ▶ Your style says a lot about you. So it's important to know why you are making those choices. You want your style to be authentic—an extension of who you are on the inside.
- ▶ If you don't understand how the media are trying to convince you that you need certain things in order to be valued, the media control you. We want you to be in control of you.

ASSIGNMENT

When you watch your favorite TV shows or music videos or are playing video games, pay close attention to the “bumper ads” (the ads before the video, TV show, or game begins) or during the commercial breaks to see what advertisers are trying to convince you to buy.

And you don't necessarily have to wait for the breaks: See if you can find any product placements during the show itself. For example, when the character is looking at a computer, can you see what kind of computer it is? Can you see what kind of drink the character is drinking? Once you start seeing one product placement, you'll probably start seeing them all over.

Let students know that they will have the chance to share their thoughts at the next session.

Bonus Activity: Are Toys Just for Fun?

Ask students to form small groups, then give each group one or more toy catalogs. Ask students to go through the catalogs and pick out toys that reflect the Girl World Box and Boy World Box. Afterward, reconvene the larger group and discuss what they found.

- ▶ What do the toys teach younger children about the “right” way to act like a boy or girl?
- ▶ Do the toys reflect any other stereotypes in our culture?



Think About It

1. Think about something you have that you value and remember when and where you were when it first occurred to you that you wanted that thing. Describe what it physically felt like to want that thing.
2. Think of the last thing that you bought that ended up being a disappointment to you when you got it. Why was it disappointing?
3. Think of a celebrity whose image and style you like. What do you like, and why?
4. Think of a celebrity whose image and style you don't like. What don't you like, and why?
5. If you wanted to change your image, would people accept that? What would they do?
6. If you had a good friend who totally changed his or her image in a way that you really didn't like, could you still maintain the friendship? Why or why not?