

She Objects Discussion Guide

Contents

1. Introduction to the Film	2
2. Ground Rules	2
I. Beauty Ideal	3
II. Hypersexualisation of Women	3
III. Leadership Ambition Gap	4
IV. Social Media and the “Selfie” Culture.....	4
4. Take Action: Recommendations and Tips.....	5
Top 10 Tips on How to ‘Object’	6
5. Appendices	7
I. Definitions	7
II. Suggested Activities.....	8
6. Contact Information.....	10

I. Introduction to the Film

She Objects challenges consumers and content creators to think critically about the correlation between the media's portrayal of women and eating disorders and self-esteem issues for girls, violence against women and the erosion of female ambition, as well as how the explosion in social media activity is contributing to these issues.

This discussion guide is designed to help students, teachers and parents engage with the content presented in the documentary. It is split into four sections, based on the four primary themes of *She Objects*: the Beauty Ideal, the Hypersexualisation of Women, the Leadership Ambition Gap, and Social Media and the "Selfie" Culture.

Given the potentially sensitive nature of the discussion content, we recommend that teachers and parents first establish ground rules that will ensure all participants can share their opinions and experiences in an environment that is accepting of different viewpoints.

In each section of the guide, you will find some suggested questions as discussion prompters. A glossary of key terms has also been included in the appendices. We have also provided suggestions for other interactive activities to help engage participants in the issues at hand.

2. Ground Rules

The aim of this guide is to create a climate for open dialogue and to encourage everyone to share their diverse viewpoints. Because of this, here are a few ground rules to keep in mind during the discussion:

- I will respect other viewpoints even if I don't agree with them.
- I will not be too embarrassed to ask questions.
- I will not ask personal questions.
- All views shared will remain confidential.

3. Discussion Questions

I. Beauty Ideal

Women who are saturated by media messages are more likely to be unhappy with their bodies, leading to eating disorders and low self-esteem.

1. Is there a conventional definition of beauty in Hong Kong and what are the drivers behind this?
2. What impact do ads featuring super skinny models have on women and girls? Are men subject to similar pressures to conform?
3. What is the link between low self-esteem and consumerism and what kind of harmful consequences can ensue if this is taken to the extreme?
4. Can the pursuit of beauty be healthy and affirming? Is this supported by mainstream advertising today?
5. The London Underground has just banned “body-shaming” ads in tube stations in London. Do you think Hong Kong should follow suit?
6. What will it take to change the status quo and for more brands to use models in their ad campaigns that reflect the diversity of shapes and sizes that make up the human race?

II. Hypersexualisation of Women

Boys who are exposed to sexually explicit materials and pornography have a greater proclivity towards sexual harassment while girls who are exposed to these materials believe sexual coercion is more permissible in relationships.

1. Why does sex ‘sell’?
2. What effect does the hypersexualised portrayal of women in the media have on women/girls and on men/boys?
3. How do we draw the line between celebrating women’s sexuality and portraying women as sexual prey?
4. Given what we know about the impact of porn and images that demean women on young boys and girls, how can we stop the hypersexualisation of women in music videos and video games that are particularly targeted at youth?
5. What role can/should parents – meaning both dads and mums – play in helping their children to process media messages that portray women and girls as sexual prey and men as needing to assert their masculinity by sleeping with women?

III. Leadership Ambition Gap

Media stereotypes of men as leaders and women in support roles are a critical factor in the erosion of ambition and the under-representation of women leaders across industry and professional sectors.

1. How do gender stereotypes affect our perception of men and women's capabilities?
2. How does the media cover successful women and women leaders differently from successful men and male leaders? What impact does this have?
3. Do you think the main media icons for young girls like the Disney princesses and Barbie are positive role models? Disney has consciously evolved its programming and Mattel has similarly evolved Barbie from where they started - do you think more evolution would be desirable and in what direction?
4. HK TV programmes and entrenched societal attitudes continue to denigrate women who are unmarried at 30 as "leftover women". How does this impact the aspirations of HK women and girls? What can be done to reverse these attitudes?
5. While too much media continues to promote traditional stereotypes that limit women to subordinate roles, media can also be a positive force for good, inspiring women and girls to have bolder ambitions for themselves. Can you think of examples of female movie or TV characters who are positive role models and how has this impacted you or women and girls that you know?

IV. Social Media and the "Selfie" Culture

Today, we are all content creators and distributors with the unprecedented connectivity we enjoy through social media and the ubiquity of mobile devices with camera and video functions.

1. Is media just a mirror of societal values or does it drive societal values?
2. How can we broaden the focus of social media to ensure we aren't largely judging people on their looks but also their actions and values?
3. What sort of example do we need to set ourselves to encourage our kids to use social media responsibly?
4. Can popularity on social media provide a sustained sense of contentment or fulfilment? What are the consequences if people are constantly seeking validation from social media?
5. How prepared are you and your children to deal with cyber-bullying or online taunting or teasing and where would you go for help if this were to become an issue for your family?

4. Take Action: Recommendations and Tips

Take the Pledge at <http://sheobjects.org/>. Click “Count Me In” to add your voice to the thousands of people who have made a promise to safeguard the positive portrayal of women in the media. Communities and individuals at work and at home, women and men, girls and boys – are all part of the solution.

By taking the pledge, you promise to:

- Object to the representation of women as objects and refute the age-old adage “sex sells”
- Object to the idea that beauty only comes in one shape and size
- Object to gender stereotypes relating to careers and leadership roles
- Use social media responsibly and encourage the younger generation to do the same
- Contribute to an environment where everyone, regardless of gender, race, class, age, or circumstance, can reach their full potential

Top 10 Tips on How to 'Object'

There are many other ways you can object to the imposition of unrealistic social expectations on, and objectification and hypersexualisation of women in today's society.

- S** **tart conversations** about the representation of women and men in the media with your friends, family, and teachers using this Discussion Guide.
- H** **eForShe!** We hope more men will step up to support our campaign! As a corollary, we should also pay attention to the ways in which men are objectified and stereotyped by the media. We can all work together to dismantle gender stereotypes and create an environment where we can thrive regardless of our gender!
- E** **valuate the content** that you consume both online and offline. Think about why people and concepts are being presented in certain ways and whether or not you think that presentation aligns with your values. Use social media to call out content that objectifies, demeans and reduces women.
- O** **rganise screenings** of She Objects in your community and host a discussion group after the screening. The more we talk about these issues, the more aware we become of them, and the more effectively we can act to solve them.
- B** **e bold** – stay true to your principles and exercise critical thinking and judgment. You know yourself, your body, and your life best – no one can or should tell you what to do or think.
- J** **udge a book by its content, not its cover** – the next time you meet someone new, try to withhold judgment on their appearance. Instead, strike up a conversation that focuses on their interests and aspirations prior to making a judgement about the type of person they are. Avoid “body talk”, that is, talk about people's bodies – we are so much more than our appearance!
- E** **xpand** the reach of She Objects – create art, videos, or publish your observations on the objectification of women to help raise awareness of these issues.
- C** **ommit to confidence** – we are all unique as individuals, endowed with special qualities. We should be confident in the fact that we deserve to thrive and to become the best that we can be.
- T** **ake your friends with you** – support each another in challenging harmful societal norms.
- S** **hare your thoughts** on She Objects, the situation of women in Hong Kong, and how you plan to object at sheobjects@twfhk.org, on Instagram (@sheobjects), and on Facebook (@sheobjects)!

5. Appendices

I. Definitions¹

Term	Definitions
Gender Identity	An internal sense of one's gender. Gender identities include “man”, “woman” and “transgender”, however there are many labels to account for the diversity of gender identities that exist.
Gender Expression	External manifestations of gender, expressed through one’s personal presentation, including name, pronouns, clothing, hair, voice, or bodily characteristics.
Sex	“Sex” is the classification of bodies (by hospitals, authorities, society) according to anatomical sex characteristics such as hormones, reproductive organs, genitalia, and chromosomes.
Sexuality	“Sexual orientation” is an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to people of different genders.
Gender Stereotype	Gender stereotypes are generalisations about certain social groups’ traits based on their gender. Examples: girls are gentle, boys are tough etc.
Hypersexualisation	The widespread portrayal of women in an exaggerated sexual manner, most prominently in the media.
Objectification	The process by which an individual person is denigrated to the status of an object, rather than an agentive subject.
Body Talk	Conversations that place undue emphasis on people’s appearance, whether intended positively or negatively.
Intersectionality	A theoretical framework that seeks to understand the ways in which different aspects of identity, including gender identity, sexuality, race, class, and ability, intersect to position individuals in different positions of privilege. First popularised by Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw.

¹ All definitions reference those established and used by UN Women, GLAAD, Women Not Objects

II. Suggested Activities

Activity #1: 'Knowing Mandy'

As you know from watching the film, Mandy suffered from bullying at school, where she was teased because of her body shape and appearance. This bullying happened in the classroom and online, and Mandy felt overwhelmed by how relentless the put-downs were. Mandy's mental health deteriorated to the point where she was cutting herself.

She Objects shared just a snippet of Mandy's personality. What you didn't see is that Mandy is a hard-worker who consistently earns good grades. Before the school bullying started, Mandy loved dancing, and when she was younger, she would spend each weekend choreographing dance routines with her friends. Mandy's favourite hobby these days is reading books and getting lost in imaginary worlds.

At home, Mandy helps out around the house a lot. She's the oldest of four children, and is like a second mother to her younger siblings. She's close to her father, but has always felt pressure from her mother which has caused some distance. But they still love each other.

Mandy is kind-hearted, inquisitive, sensitive, loyal and intelligent. She has an excellent sense of humour, and is a natural leader, as was recognised by her teacher in the story you saw on *She Objects*. She is now studying to be a registered social worker, to help others who have had similar experiences.

Now that you know more about Mandy, there is clearly much more to her than her appearance. Why do you think this is what the bullies focused on?

Food For Thought:

- Do you relate to Mandy's story?
- Why do you think the people bullied Mandy? Why do bullies behave the way they do?

Suggested conclusion:

We are all more than our appearance. What are ways we can work together to emphasise aspects of ourselves that are more important, e.g. personality, interests and experiences?

Activity #2: She Objects and He Objects

She Objects discusses the damaging effects of the objectification and hypersexualisation of women. However, men are also objectified in the media, albeit in different ways. This activity aims to provide participants with an opportunity to look for different patterns in the way media presents gender.

Materials:

Old magazines, newspapers, and / or access to a computer

Instructions:

Ask participants to look for advertisements and articles in media that feature both men and women. Compare and contrast the ways in which they are portrayed.

Food for Thought:

Compare and contrast the way men and women are portrayed. Why do these differences exist?

Suggested conclusion:

We must all work together to dismantle the damaging ways in which female and male bodies are being commodified by the media.

Activity #3: Gender Stereotypes

Materials: Pieces of paper with traditional gender roles, pieces of paper with either “masculine” or “feminine” written on them

Instructions:

1. Split the participants into groups of 5-6 people or 3-4 people each.
2. Ask each group to pick a personality trait/action/behaviour (e.g. good-humoured, being scared of cockroaches, playing piano). Then, ask them to pick a label between “masculine” and “feminine”.
3. Each group acts out the action in a “feminine” or a “masculine way”, and the other groups have to guess what action and what gender stereotype is being acted out. The groups get a point for each action they correctly guess.

Food for Thought:

- Who taught you that men and women behave differently?
- Do they actually behave differently in real life?
- Early childhood socialisation leads us to internalise certain gender stereotypes. What is the impact of stereotypes on the way we perceive different genders' abilities?
- What about people who don't fit into societal gender roles? Is there anything wrong with defying gender stereotypes?
- Not everyone is either a man or a woman. There exist many genders, for example, some people are transgender (their assigned sex at birth does not correspond to their gender identity). With this in mind, is there value in maintaining rigid gender stereotypes? Why or why not?

Suggested conclusion:

Many of the gender roles that we take for granted are actually products of socialisation. Ultimately, regardless of our gender, we should be able to live and thrive and be our best selves.



6. Contact Information

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