

USING MEDIA EDUCATION TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT

Media (TV shows, advertisements, online games, social media, music videos, etc.) are the dominant storytellers in modern society. As such, they play an influential role in shaping how we see ourselves and each other. While MEF does not believe that media directly cause violence, we do believe that the narratives created by media affect our attitudes toward gender, sex, and relationships. They also normalize violence. Messages that equate manhood with dominance and violence, and that portray girls and women as objects, pervade the culture—and these messages intersect with gender and power dynamics that frequently play out in sexual assault, sexual harassment, rape, and other forms of gender violence. Media messages are constructions, and learning how to deconstruct them is key—both to understanding the cultural forces contributing to sexual assault and working to prevent it.

1 **Show *The Bystander Moment, Flirting with Danger, Asking For It, Spitting Game, Rape Myths on Trial, Understanding Hookup Culture, The Date Rape Backlash, The Line, War Zone, or another MEF film*** in a class, residence hall, during a PTA meeting, at a teen workshop, at your local library, or to another group that's important to you. Discuss the ways that media normalize violence and reinforce, as well as construct, stereotypical ideas about gender. Talk about how media portrayals of power in gender dynamics, messages about consent, and definitions of assault contribute to sexual violence. Use the discussion questions and exercises in the study guides to help you. You can read descriptions and watch previews of all MEF films on the topic of gender-based violence here: <https://shop.mediaed.org/gender-based-violence--prevention-c66.aspx>

2 **Use social media to call out advertisers and media companies** when you spot harmful gender stereotypes or messages that minimize, normalize or romanticize sexual harassment or assault. Join forces with other individuals, groups and organizations that care about this issue and turn it into a social media campaign!



“Rape is tacitly condoned through denial of the rape epidemic, denial of the harms of rape, not considering rape [as] a ‘real’ crime, victim-blaming, trivializing rape, and the normalization of female sexual objectification and rape eroticization in pop culture.”

—**Caroline Heldman and Baillee Brown, *Ms. Magazine***

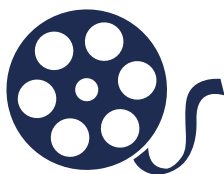
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3 Sign a petition or create your own email- or letter-writing campaign to oppose offensive media messages and pressure companies to change. About-Face (www.about-face.org) hosts petitions and offers other ideas and resources for taking action. Specifically, see this guide to creating your own letter or petition: <https://www.about-face.org/educate-yourself/for-adult-advocates/help-your-girls/write-a-complaint-letter/>.



4 Here's another idea from About-Face (www.about-face.org): **Write a message on magazine subscription cards, and send them back to the companies at their own expense!**

5 **Write a letter to the editor of your local paper** expressing concerns about the media portrayal of girls and women, and explain the links to sexual harassment and assault.



6 **Screen an MEF film in your community and use it as a springboard to take a collective stand against sexual violence and rape culture.** For example, screen *The Bystander Moment* in coordination with a march to raise awareness about the role of bystanders in preventing sexual assault. Partner with a local prevention organization to host a screening of *Flirting With Danger* or *The Line* and initiate a conversation about consent. Or show *War Zone* to launch an effort to prevent street harassment in your neighborhood.

7 **Connect with a local organization working to prevent sexual assault to hold a poster-making party, and then display the posters in your community.** Ask the participants to consider the links between media and sexual violence. Always put a hotline number and web address on the posters to inform people of where to go for more information.

8 **Encourage your college or university, alma mater, or a local institution of higher learning with on-campus housing to create a residence life program on the topic.** Ask the Office of Residence Life to make an MEF film such as *The Bystander Moment*, *Flirting With Danger*, *Spitting Game*, or *Understanding Hookup Culture* available for resident assistants to screen in dormitories, along with discussion guides.

9 **Ask your local community access TV station to show an MEF film or series of films and promote the showings through your local press.** To learn more about how to get permission to have films shown on community access TV, write to info@mediaed.org.



10 **Create and promote your own content** that questions media messages about sex, consent, gender, power and violence. Consider becoming a Feministing community blogger at feministing.com or joining the Adbusters culture jammer network at adbusters.com.