

IDENTIFYING SAMPLE MEDIA MESSAGES

In this module, you will help your students identify common messages and themes found in the media that your students consume. This table will help you find samples to use in your classroom that illustrate each theme. The table is sorted by common themes found in media about sex, dating, and relationships. For each theme, there are key search terms you can use when researching sample materials that are relevant to the youth in your classrooms. Also included are sample media messages that illustrate each message/theme and a takeaway message (learning outcome) youth should come away with after discussing each common message/theme.

Media that youth consume is constantly evolving. To prepare for the activities in this module, you will need to locate current messages relevant to your own students. **The materials in this table are for illustrative purposes only. The sample materials you select should be age-appropriate and within the norms of what is acceptable to show to youth in your community. Even though you will be using the samples to illustrate and counter harmful media messages, you will need to use your judgment regarding which messages will be appropriate to share. Consider the age of your youth population, the norms and policies of your host organization/implementation site (e.g., school, after-school program, other community organization), and the views of the parents of the youth you serve. Also consider that some depictions could be triggering for youth who have experienced trauma. Consult [Creating Safe Spaces: Facilitator's Guide to Trauma-Informed Programming](#) for tips on using a trauma-informed approach to conduct this activity.**

Where do I find relevant samples?

1. One good strategy is to consider the most popular media youth are consuming. These links can help you identify relevant media sources:
 - <https://www.loveisrespect.org/resources/unhealthy-disney-romances/>
 - <https://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100/>
 - <https://editorial.rottentomatoes.com/guide/popular-movies/>
 - <https://www.ranker.com/list/shows-about-generation-z/ranker-TV>
 - <https://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/gallery/gen-z-TV-shows>
2. Another good strategy is to search for terms related to the message or relationship characteristic you are trying to identify on YouTube or another video sharing website like Vimeo.
3. It's also helpful to read a brief summary of the media sample you are considering using in order to become familiar with characters and storylines.

Unhealthy Messages/Themes in Media	Key Search Terms ¹	Specific Samples in the Media (e.g., video clips, song lyrics) that Illustrate the Message/Theme ²	Main Takeaway Message
A relationship will save me from my troubles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rescue romance + trope + TV shows • savior complex + trope + TV shows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Titanic</i>: Jack rescues Rose when she attempts suicide. She falls in love with him and says he saved her in every way a person could be saved—despite only knowing him for a couple of days. • Alternative sample found by facilitator: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A partner shouldn't be expected to solve someone else's problems or be treated as a mental health professional. • If someone is struggling, it is important that they seek out professional mental health care.
It's romantic for my partner to threaten harm to themselves or others to get me to do what they ask.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manipulation in relationships + TV shows • Threats of self-harm + TV shows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Notebook</i> (through 3:10): Noah asks Allie out on date by climbing onto a Ferris wheel and jumping into her seat. Even after she repeatedly says no, Noah dangles from the bar of the Ferris wheel until she finally says yes. • Alternative sample found by facilitator: 	It is never romantic for your partner to threaten to harm themselves or others if you don't give in to their request. That is a form of manipulation and abuse.
I can change my partner if I love them enough or stay with them long enough.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unhealthy relationships + TV shows • Toxic relationships + TV shows • Abusive relationships + TV shows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>After</i>: Hardin makes a bet that he can get Tessa to fall in love with him. Even after learning how he had lied to her, Tessa continues to put up with Hardin's manipulative, emotionally abusive behavior. This sends the message that it's okay to sacrifice your own happiness for the sake of a difficult relationship in the hope that your partner will change. • Alternative sample found by facilitator: 	Expecting a partner to change is not a good way to start a relationship. If you regularly feel unsupported, controlled, or disrespected, don't expect the behaviors to disappear. Get support from a trusted adult to help you leave.

1 You can do separate searches by substituting the terms "music," "movies," or "commercial/advertisement" for "TV shows."

2 Your goal is to find messages that are relevant to your students. These samples are for illustrative purposes only. You can, however, use a sample from this table if you are comfortable using it.

Unhealthy Messages/Themes in Media	Key Search Terms ¹	Specific Samples in the Media (e.g., video clips, song lyrics) that Illustrate the Message/Theme ²	Main Takeaway Message
<p>It's okay to stay with my partner, even if they use threats, intimidation, isolation, or stalking to control my behavior.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stalking in relationships + TV shows • Intimidation in relationships + TV shows • Isolation in relationships + TV shows • Controlling behavior in relationships + TV shows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Twilight</i> (first 40 seconds): Bella wakes up to find Edward in her room and asks him how he got in. He tells her that he's been coming in through her window for the past couple of months and says "I like watching you sleep, it's kind of fascinating to me" before he kisses her. • Alternative sample found by facilitator: 	<p>Stalking is not romantic. In fact, stalking is significantly connected to control in relationships, assault, and intimate partner homicide. It's a red flag if your partner is using threats, intimidation, isolation, or stalking to control your behavior.</p>
<p>Dramatic relationships are more interesting and preferable to healthy, safe relationships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toxic relationships romanticized + TV shows • Relationship goals + TV shows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Gossip Girl</i> (through 1:26): Chuck is physically and emotionally abusive toward Blair, and attempted to assault her best friend, Serena. Blair constantly lies, steals, and cheats to get what she wants. Although they bring out the worst in each other, their relationship has been labeled with the hashtag "#relationshipgoals" because they always return to each other. <p>Note to facilitator: A more modern sample depicting a toxic, abusive relationship is that of Nate and Maddy, as seen in this clip from <i>Euphoria</i>. This series is rated by Common Sense Media as being for ages 18+ and is described as containing "wall-to-wall sexual violence, drugs, language in dark drama." This video clip may be triggering even for adults, especially after the 1-minute mark. We share the clip and encourage facilitators to learn about the series so you are aware of the content some youth are watching and can be prepared to respond to comments and questions about it. We do not encourage you to use this sample in your lesson.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative sample found by facilitator: 	<p>Although dramatic relationships might be interesting to watch play out on screen, we shouldn't be looking to model our relationships on them. Having intense, roller-coaster emotions in a relationship does not mean two people are deeply or madly in love. It is a red flag. Real love generally makes you feel happy and secure.</p>

Unhealthy Messages/Themes in Media	Key Search Terms ¹	Specific Samples in the Media (e.g., video clips, song lyrics) that Illustrate the Message/Theme ²	Main Takeaway Message
<p>It's okay to view women as objects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectification of women + TV shows • Degrading TV shows • Sexism + TV shows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Axe Fireball commercial: The commercial shows a man using Axe products and the product being so attractive that a fireball of women comes hurtling toward him. • Carl's Jr. commercial: This commercial attempts to sell natural hamburgers using a model walking naked around a farmer's market. • Alternative sample found by facilitator: 	<p>Often, music videos, video games, commercials, and other media use the objectification of women to sell their products in a humorous way or to attempt to make a certain message or product more appealing. Research shows that objectification is directly associated with negative consequences such as a diminished view of women's competence and a greater tolerance of sexual violence toward women.</p>
<p>If my partner is jealous of my friends or other people I interact with, it means they care about me.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jealousy in relationships + TV shows • Unhealthy jealousy + TV shows • Isolation + TV shows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victorious (through 1:33): Even though Beck and Jade had been dating for a long time, Jade was incredibly jealous and projected her insecurities onto Beck, attempting to control his behavior and who he talked to. • Alternative sample found by facilitator: 	<p>It might seem romantic when your partner is jealous of your friends or other people in your life. You might think this means they love you; however, this can lead to isolation and broken relationships with other loved ones and can make it easier for them to control you and who you spend time with. In a truly healthy relationship, your partner is supportive of your goals and your other healthy relationships.</p>

Unhealthy Messages/Themes in Media	Key Search Terms ¹	Specific Samples in the Media (e.g., video clips, song lyrics) that Illustrate the Message/Theme ²	Main Takeaway Message
<p>It's cool if someone significantly older than me shows romantic or sexual interest in me.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child grooming + TV shows • Statutory rape + TV shows • Inappropriate age gap + TV shows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pretty Little Liars (0:48 to 1:27): Aria is a 16-year-old high school student who hooked up with Ezra the day before school started. She finds out he is her teacher on the first day of school. They continue to see each other, which is illegal (statutory rape). • Alternative sample found by facilitator: 	<p>Having a much older person be interested in you romantically or sexually might be exciting and make you feel more mature. However, there is an unhealthy power dynamic at play when someone who is much older than you or is in a position of authority over you (like a teacher or boss) is expressing romantic or sexual interest in you. In most cases, this is illegal.</p>
<p>I don't need to ask for consent before I engage in sexual activity (or I can pressure someone into having sex with me).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of consent + TV shows • Pressure to have sex + TV shows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gilmore Girls: Jess pressures Rory to have sex with him, even though she is clearly hesitant. • Alternative sample found by facilitator: 	<p>A common message in media is that if you love someone, you should have sex with them; but you should never feel pressured to have sex with anyone.</p>