

The Appearance Ideal: Pursuing the Impossible

You have been selected to be an event planner to throw the best Instagram party of the year. Your boss has asked that you only invite “perfect-looking” men and women, for which you must write a detailed description. Be descriptive and avoid general terms such as “great”.

The “Perfect-Looking” Man

The “Perfect-Looking” Woman

The Appearance Ideal: Pursuing the Impossible
Use this space to take notes from the video clips and class discussion.

What is the *Appearance Ideal*?

The *appearance ideal* is what culture tells us about the ideal way to look. Matching these ideals is actually impossible so the pursuit of achieving the *appearance ideal* is unrealistic, pointless and harmful.

What do people do to themselves to try to achieve the *appearance ideal*?

Who financially gains from the pursuit of the *appearance ideal*?

What are the negative consequences on individuals?

This handout is inspired by [True To Me](#) by The Dove Self Esteem Project.

Weight-Bias and Prejudice: Self-Reflection Time!



Personal Reflection Time

Individually, take a look at these pictures and think about what were your first thoughts. Were they positive or negative?

- What were some of the first words that came to mind about these people?
- Did you have any impressions about the health and happiness of each person? What were they?
- Did you have any impressions about the level of intelligence or success of each person? What were they?
- Did you think about the attractiveness of each person? What did you think?
- Did you think of any words about the body size or shape of each person? Which ones? What words did you use to describe their bodies?

Weight Bias and Prejudice: Keeping our Biases in Check

Discrimination and stigma toward overweight people have a negative impact on their psychological and physical health, yet it is still considered socially-acceptable. More importantly, many people still believe many myths about being overweight. Time to debunk the myths!

Select and research these Fatness Myths and correct the statements to make them true.

1. Fat-shaming is a successful way to encourage overweight people to lose weight.

Truth: While fat-shaming is often justified as a means to motivate people, research demonstrates that it has the opposite effect and is often harmful in terms of mental and physical health. [SOURCE](#)

Fat shaming is the act of criticizing overweight people about their weight or eating behavior.

2. Overeating is the cause of Fatness; Fat people eat more than non-fat people.

Truth: _____

3. Overweight people are lazy and unfit.

Truth: _____

4. Body fat is unhealthy; you can't be overweight and healthy.

Truth: _____

5. Weight loss improves health and lengthens life.

Truth: _____

6. Long term treatment for being overweight through dieting is successful.

Truth: _____

Discrimination is the unfair treatment of some groups of people based on certain characteristics, such as age, sexual orientation, appearance, ethnicity, culture, disability, etc.

Stigma is the negative label people associate to a person or a group of people based on a difference.

Prejudice is a preconceived and usually negative opinion we have of something that is not based on fact or reason.

Taking Action:

Inside Out

This activity is aimed to increase your understanding of how to eventually feel true self-worth. A simple way to visualize this complex process is to look at [the pyramid of self-worth developed by Dr. Christina Hibbert](#). While this is a long process that will take many years for some, here are a few questions to get you thinking about the different aspects of self-worth.



Self-awareness is about seeing who we really are, including our strengths and weaknesses. List a few of your strength and weaknesses and focus on non-physical traits.

Strengths

Weaknesses

Self-acceptance is about learning to accept our strengths and weakness, without judgement, and coming to the understanding that our weaknesses are an opportunity to improve and our strengths are a means by which we can help others. Select a strength and a weakness and complete the sentences below.

Strength: _____ How I can use it to help others: _____

Weakness: _____ What can I do to improve it: _____

Self-love: Once we see and accept ourselves, we can move on to the next level of embracing who we are. Self-love is being kind to ourselves and engaging in self-care. Name a few activities you enjoy doing and that make you feel good about yourself.

Self-worth: This is when you understand and feel your worth and carry that confidence in your day-to-day life, even when faced with challenge or failures.

Taking Action: Helping Others

What can you do when you witness someone getting bullied?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Allyship is when people with privilege learn about the experiences of a marginalized group of people with the goal of empathizing with their challenges, building relationships and helping improve the situation. Watch [How to Be a Good Ally](#) by Ahsanta the Artist.

1. Allyship is not neutrality, nor a passive activity; what is it? _____

2. It's key to educate yourself about diverse groups of people. How can you do this?

3. Speak up - even if it uncomfortable and even if you think it's not your place. For example, what can you say to someone who just made fun of someone's ethnic background?

4. Check your privilege. What privilege do you have that some others do not have?

Taking Action: A Body-Confident Campaign

In small groups, plan and develop a project based on body positivity directed at the students of your school. The project can be informational or motivational, or both!

Keep in mind what you have learned about the *appearance ideal*, the impossibility of its pursuit, its negative consequences in terms of cost, mental health and time on people and how the beauty and diet/workout industries are the ones gaining from the *appearance ideal*.

Ideas:

- TikTok
- Posters to put around the school, in the bathrooms or gym changing rooms
- News report
- Funny/angry rant denouncing the *appearance ideal*
- Instagram page (including a hashtag, quotes, and pictures)
- TV or magazine advertisement
- Blog or vlog post (could be done by impersonating an influencer)
- Song and/or music video
- Picture or video exposing photo-manipulation

What is our goal?	
Who do we want to reach?	
What is our main message?	
What will it look like?	
Who will do what? Divide the tasks.	