

The Game

Materials: A chalkboard and chalk or a few sheets of easel paper and marking pens.

Time: This activity should take at least 45 minutes. Ideally, you have a full hour. Discussion time may approach infinity so make sure to get your main points across.

Overview: “The Game” is an interactive discussion. The main goal of this activity is for students to first see and then become critical of the complex system of values and rules (most of which are gender-based) which regulate our sexual behavior. These values and rules are contained in and perpetuated through “scripts” (called “cultural scripts” or “sexual scripts”). Although many of the “scripts” in “The Game” are not new, students are given a structure on which they can map what they observe in the world. This structure also shows how the many “scripts” in the game relate to each other, forming a complex web of often conflicting values and rules. It is the students themselves who describe the culture by brainstorming (uncensored) all of the words that they know and use to talk about sexually active and non-sexually active males and females. It is the job of the presenter to help students to dig deeper into the language to expose the underlying values and contradictions. Using storytelling to characterize both male and female experiences, the facilitator will ultimately lead the class into a discussion about how “The Game” and its rules prevent even a well informed person from implementing the “Safer Choices.” To close (depending upon time, this may be a whole activity in itself), the students will discuss what it means to play “The Game” and, most importantly, how we can resist doing so. The presenter of this activity must have a willingness to listen and learn from the audience as well as perform and tell stories.

Setting up “The Game”

Elicit the “Safer Choices” from the class. **What strategies can you use to prevent yourself from getting an STD?** List them on the right side of the board and discuss.

On the left side of the board draw a stick figure to represent the students. Underneath the figure, write “you”. On top write “the facts” to signify that this person knows all of the facts and information regarding the prevention of HIV infection. **Ideally, each of you will be able to use the “Safer Choices” when they are necessary in your life.** Draw an arching line from the top of the stick figure to the “Safer Choices” **Is it possible, even though you know how to protect yourself from HIV, that you or your friends will fail to choose one of the “Safer Choices”?** Said another way, **Is it possible that one of you will have unprotected sex with a person who has not been tested for HIV? Why?** List the reasons that students come up with and discuss briefly.

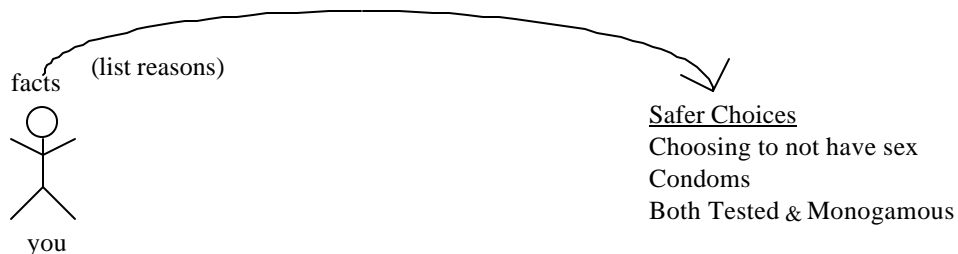


Figure 1

Redefining 'Peer Pressure'

People say that there is a lot of pressure to have sex and yet when you ask them to describe a time when they were pressured by a peer, they can't. What does sexual peer pressure actually look like? Make up absurd examples of overt peer pressure (e.g. A bully walks up and says hey wimp, smoke this cigarette...) **Does it usually happen this way?** (Facilitate discussion)

Make this point: People **do** experience overt peer pressure (e.g. Drink! Drink! Drink!) but most often pressure creeps into our minds in subtle and insidious ways. We forget that we can feel pressure even when the pressuring person isn't even talking directly to us. (Tell stories about sexually inexperienced teenagers at parties or in the locker room listening to others talk about sex and feeling pressure.) Because it is so subtle, often we don't even label it as "peer pressure". When the term "peer pressure" is used, it often fails to acknowledge the internal workings of that pressure. Such as: What is going on in the person's head after he or she hears a pressuring comment? Does the person believe what he or she is being told? Does he or she go home that night and repeat the pressuring messages over and over. This is where "peer pressure" starts sounding a lot like "self-pressure".

"The Game"

1. Draw a large 2x2 matrix (figure 2) on the board.
2. Write "male" and "female" across the top.
3. Write "sex" and "no sex" down the left side.

	MALE	FEMALE
SEX	A	D
NO SEX	B	C

Figure 2

4. For this activity, it is very important that the students do not censor their language. For a limited time only, in response to the following questions, you can use any words that pop up into your heads even if those words aren't usually appropriate in classrooms, places of worship or around one's grandparents. The words that the students produce are written in the appropriate boxes. (see figure 2) The order in which the following

questions are asked is very important.

box A: What are the names that a male gets called if he is sexually active?

box B: What are the names that a male gets called if he is not sexually active?

box C: What are the names that a female gets called if she not sexually active?

box D: What are the names that a female gets called if she is sexually active?

5. For each box ask: **Does the person who is called these names hear them as compliments or “put-downs?”** Put a (+) next to compliments and a (-) next to insults.

	MALE	FEMALE	
SEX	"stud" "player" (+)	"slut" "dirty" (-)	
NO SEX	"fag" "wimp" (-)	"prude" "virgin" "good" (+)	"tease"

Figure 3

Discussion Questions

- Looking up at the diagram we have constructed together, does anyone have any initial observations that they would like to share?
- Next, we are going to discuss what it is like growing up as a male versus growing up as a female. What are the rules of “the game” if you are a male? What are the rules of “the game” if you are a female?
- Are there any winners in this “game”? How is “the game” more than just a double standard? How do girls lose “the game”? How do guys lose “the game”?
- How does “the game” make it difficult for guys and girls to use the Safer Choices in every sexual situation?

Discussion Points

How “the game” prevents females from choosing the “Safer Choices.”

Choosing not to have sex

- At a certain age (which seems to get younger and younger), girls are made to feel like “prudes, uptight, or immature” if they have not had sexual experience (includes kissing, touching, dating, etc.).

- Sexual activity is seen as an adult behavior and thus it is a sign of maturity.
- Females are taught to make others, especially men, happy. Put another way, females learn to be afraid to make men angry. This takes away a female's power when she tries to say "no" to sexual pressure.
- Women are told by the world that having a boyfriend/husband is the ultimate goal. He is a source of money, protection, transportation, self-esteem, and completeness. In this context, pleasing your man becomes extremely important and if your boyfriend wants sex it is going to be very difficult to say "no."

Condoms

- A female who buys, has, or carries condoms risks being seen as a "slut."
- A female must get her partner to agree to use condoms.
- A girl learns very early on that she should not talk about sex. She has not had any role models who talked about sex or any practice talking to someone about sex.
- A girl learns that it is not okay for her to know about sex. If she does, she must not show it. The implication is that knowing about sex means you are doing it and girls shouldn't be doing it.
- Females are taught to make others, especially men, happy. Put another way, females learn to be afraid to make men angry. If he doesn't want to use a condom, a female is less likely to have been trained to stand her ground.
- One of the scripts in "the game" is that one way to prove our love for someone is to trust them, even if that trust has not yet been earned. "I love you so much I'll do anything (take large risks) for you." In this context, condoms signify the lack of trust and thus a lack of love.

Testing & Monogamy

- The love scripts says "I love you so much that I would do anything for you." That includes trusting the other person before that person has earned the trust. Asking someone to get tested is seen as a lack of trust and thus a lack of love.

How "the game" prevents males from choosing the "safer choices"

Choosing not to have sex

- It can be said that males don't even have this choice at all. If a male is not having sex it can't possibly be because he has chosen not to, the assumption is that there must be a problem: he is gay, he is ugly, he is scared, he is religious, or he is impotent.
- Sex has somehow become a rite of passage/initiation into manhood for boys. Choosing not to have sex is choosing not to be a man. Males are asked to undergo great risk to prove and maintain their manhood/masculinity.

Condoms

- One of the main scripts in "the game" for men is that they have uncontrollable libido (sex drive). Once they get going, they can't stop for anything, including putting on a condom.
- In "the game" penetration is the ultimate goal of sex. It defines the loss of virginity. Penetration is not possible without an erection. Condoms take a bit of time to use and they do result in a slight loss of feeling. (The use of lubrication and eroticizing safer

sex can be effective here.) Anything that, in anyway, threatens the erection, threatens a male's masculinity, it threatens "the man."

- Real men are supposed to be ready, willing and able to take risks. They are taught to shun protection: helmets or condoms. Men are supposed to have "no fear."
- Men learn to brag about scars. As odd as it may sound, anecdotal stories show men bragging about herpes, gonorrhea, crabs or getting girls pregnant. It is a sign of a male's manhood.

Monogamy & Testing

- A mongamous man (he has only one partner) is teased about being "pussy-whipped" if there is any suggestion that he changes his plans for her sake. His girlfriend is called a "ball and chain."
- A "real man" must have multiple partners. This signifies three things: his sex drive is so tremendously powerful that he can't let a viable sexual partner past him, he is so good looking that the girls can't leave him alone (and a real man is not going to refuse sex) and/or he is a suave/smooth "Casanova/Mack-daddy" who has "got his game going on" and when he is around the girls simply "swoon."
- Boys learn to brag and joke about sex but they (like the females) do not get any modeling or practice discussing sex and related issues in a serious way. Testing requires the initiation of a frank sex-related discussion. Monogamy requires the ongoing negotiation of a relationship.
- A real man would not wait to have sex. He would "hit that" as soon as possible. Waiting 3-6 months is not even a consideration for a male who is playing "the game."