

PRICING BEAUTY (FIRST DAY OF CLASS ACTIVITY)

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SUGGESTED CITATION

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Abstract

Using Ashley Mears' Pricing Beauty as a basis, students are introduced to stratification, the social construction of beauty, and content analysis on the first day of class. Moreover, the class discussion prompted by the activity helps set the tone for future class discussions.

Details

Subject Areas: Introduction to Sociology/Social Problems

Resource Types: Class Activity

Class Levels: College 100

Class Sizes: Small

Usage Notes

By introducing this activity on the first day, most students are going to have very little understanding of sociology at this point. The tone of the class has not yet been set to prevent sexist and other derogatory comments from students, but is being set through this activity.

This exercise could make students uncomfortable because images may be offensive as sexist, racist, and so on. Make sure that magazines are not sexually explicit, unless you forewarn students or opt to add an additional layer to the discussion.

Learning Goals and Assessments

LEARNING GOALS

Goal 1: This exercise is designed for students to introduce students to the research tools that sociologists use, specifically, content analysis.

Goal 2: This activity will introduce students to the concept of stratification in an effort to give students a preview of one of the major course components.

Goal 3: The tone of the activity will help "break the ice" on the first day of the semester and prepare the students for subsequent class discussions.

ASSESSMENTS

Goal 1: Test question

Goal 2: Test question

Resource Files

XLSX

DOCX

PPTX

TECHNIQUE: *PRICING BEAUTY* (FIRST DAY OF CLASS ACTIVITY)

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COURSES: Introduction to Sociology (in-person)

TEACHING/LEARNING GOAL:

- Goal 1: This exercise is designed for students to introduce students to the research tools that sociologists use, specifically, content analysis.
- Goal 2: This activity will introduce students to the concept of stratification in an effort to give students a preview of one of the major course components.
- Goal 3: The tone of the activity will help “break the ice” on the first day of the semester and prepare the students for subsequent class discussions.

TEACHING OBJECTIVES:

- Introduce the sociological imagination
- Describe stratification along the lines of gender, race, and age in fashion modeling
- Compare how stratification appears across media, specifically, fashion magazines and catalogues
- Explain social construction theory using beauty
- Evaluate images using content analysis

ANTICIPATED LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Students will be introduced to the sociological imagination is a way of viewing the world.
- Students will recognize how age, gender, and race intersect with one another through a discussion of which types of bodies are considered more desirable for modeling than others.
- Students will be introduced to how sociologists can study stratification by using popular culture and content analysis as a research method.
- Students will be introduced to the concept of social construction through a discussion of what counts as beauty.

REFERENCES:

Clements, Erin. 2012. “Ashley Mears’ ‘Pricing Beauty’ Gives Inside Look at the Modeling Industry.” *Stylist/The Huffington Post*. September 22. Retrieved January 9, 2013 (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/21/pricing-beauty_n_973795.html).

Mears, Ashley. 2011. *Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Fashion magazines and catalogues, ideally recent (at least two of each for each student group)
- Powerpoint
- Post-it notes (one package for each group)

ESTIMATED TIME:

In-person courses: Approximately 45 minutes

PROCEDURE:

For the Instructor:

On the first day of class, before any introductions, ask students what is sociology. After reaching a basic definition, ask students what is sociological about fashion modeling. Discuss for a minute or two.

Split students up into groups of 3-5 students. Give each group a set of post-it notes, at least two fashion magazines and two clothing catalogues, and a copy of the analysis sheet (separate file).

For the Students:

For this assignment, you will be performing a content analysis of fashion magazines and clothing catalogues. You are to identify five advertisements, fashion spreads, and editorials in the magazines and five pages in the clothing catalogue to analyze. You are to mark each page you analyze with a post-it note so you can refer back to it. Identify the key model on the page. For each page you have marked, identify the following for the key model: (about 15 minutes)

1. Gender
2. Race
3. Age
4. Celebrity or non-celebrity?
5. Is the model alone or with other people? Describe.
6. What is the type of product advertised (e.g., clothing, perfume, car)?

Once, this step is complete, discuss your findings with your group and answer the following questions (about 10 minutes):

What patterns did you uncover? For example, were all of the models women? Were all the models celebrities? Tabulate your results.

Next, we will discuss your results as a class. (about 15 minutes)

For the Instructor:

- I frame our class discussion around stratification, but this activity also raises the topics of what makes a successful model and the social construction of beauty.
- I created a PowerPoint to illustrate the themes I suspect students will find in their analysis (separate file). I used Google Images and Sociological Images to find advertising to illustrate each aspect of inequality. For each slide, I ask students to name models that fit the feature of the slide:
 - Gender: Can you name any male or female models?
 - Race: Can you name any Black models? Asian models? Latino models? White models?

- Age: Can you name any older models? Younger models? Middle-aged models?
- I provide context to the images and the models students have named:
 - Gender (information is from Mears 2011): I am sure to include an advertisement that includes both a man and a woman. I ask students about how models are paid. Modeling is a career that greatly favors women models over men models. The pay for female models is 2-3 times more than male models even in the same advertisement and both are unknowns. I ask students why and then ask them to name other occupations where women out earn men (e.g., prostitution, stripping, and porn acting). We discuss why this pay gap exists and what these occupations have in common.
 - Race: Students typically have a difficult time naming famous models who are Black, Latino, or Asian (and who are also not famous as actresses or actors). The images I use come from Sociological Images. Every few months, they get more image submissions where non-white people are used in fashion spreads as scenery or decoration with a White model as the center or true focus. Not only does this get us talking about beauty standards but also how people of color are portrayed when they are included in fashion spreads.
 - Age: When age comes up, we can bring the discussion back to Mears (2011) by talking about intersectionality. A woman's modeling career is at its best between the ages of 13 and 23, while men's careers is at its best after they finish college and can last for 20 years. We discuss what this means for men and women who want to become models. For women, this means delaying or forgoing college, while men may be college-educated when they begin modeling.
 - Other features of stratification: While discussion gender, race, and age, other aspects of stratification tend to emerge. For example, social class, size, and ability. This leads towards a discussion of what makes a model successful and finally, how beauty is socially constructed.

INTERPRETATION:

All students have some knowledge of modeling. They are exposed to a near constant stream of advertising depicting models. Most are familiar with the criticism of modeling as it relates to disordered eating. Most, however, have not thought critically about what makes a successful model or how that success is socially patterned.

POSSIBLE PITFALLS:

By introducing this activity on the first day, most students are going to have very little understanding of sociology at this point. The tone of the class has not yet been set to prevent sexist and other derogatory comments from students, but is being set through this activity.

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ASSESSMENT EXAMPLES:

Test questions:

1. Studying fashion modeling illustrates how

- a. beauty is socially constructed.
 - b. inequality is reproduced in the pages of fashion magazines.
 - c. the intersectionality of race, gender, and age.
 - d. All of the above.**
2. When sociologists count the number of times something occurs in an advertisement, they are most likely using
 - a. interview.
 - b. surveys.
 - c. content analysis.**
 - d. participant observation.
3. Discuss at least two ways in which fashion industry is stratified. Be sure to explain what sociologists mean by stratification. Are other industries stratified in the same way as the fashion industry? Explain.