



SCREENING TIPS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONTEXTS

Straightlaced—How Gender's Got Us All Tied Up takes a powerful and intimate look at how popular pressures around gender and sexuality are shaping the lives of American teens. The film proudly showcases the diverse and unscripted voices of more than 50 high school students from a variety of different communities, all of whom speak with breathtaking honesty, insight, and humor about gender roles and their struggles to be who they really are.

The film covers a wide range of issues, including:

- appearance
- body image
- dating and relationships
- sexual pressures
- academics and school
- teen violence
- family expectations
- gender roles and stereotypes
- meanings of masculinity and femininity
- identity questions
- gender, race and culture
- gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender experiences
- homophobia
- gender-based violence
- media messages
- activity and career choices
- and more

As the youth in *Straightlaced* share their courageous stories, they model the possibility of dialogue and action, offering both teens and adults a springboard for exploring crucial safety, identity, and equity issues and for helping to build more inclusive and empowering schools and communities.

Following are some initial suggestions for using the film with educators and youth service providers. This guide is still in development, so please share your feedback with us!

ESTABLISH GROUND RULES

Before showing the film, we strongly recommend establishing group agreements for discussion as a way to foster safe dialogue and mutual respect as participants talk about *Straightlaced*'s complex and sometimes emotional issues. You may already have a set of ground rules or agreements in your professional development context; if so, we recommend reviewing them with the group and adding any needed pieces related to this particular conversation. If you do not already have group agreements, we suggest creating a list to guide your viewing and discussing of *Straightlaced*.

Here are some suggested agreements:

- Be an active and respectful listener
- Assume the best intentions of everyone
- Disagree respectfully
- Use “I” statements, not generalizations
- Maintain confidentiality
- Everyone has the right to pass or not answer a particular question
- Share the air—be mindful that everyone needs time to speak

PRE-SCREENING ACTIVITY

The purpose of this brief pre-screening activity is to establish a personal connection to the issues in *Straightlaced* and to begin an initial group conversation about the topics the film raises.

Activity: Messages You've Gotten About Gender – Pair Share or Individual Drawing/Collage/Writing

Question: What messages did you get growing up about how boys/men were supposed to be or how girls/women were supposed to be? How do you feel about these messages?

Start with either pair-share or individual drawing/collage/writing – then short group debrief.

INTRODUCING THE FILM

We suggest including the following elements in your introduction to the film:

- *Background on Straightlaced*, noting that it is a documentary featuring real youth sharing their perspectives and stories about gender – and talking about how gender expectations intersect with issues of race, culture, class and sexuality.
- *Explanation of language used in the film*, preparing viewers for the fact that youth have been encouraged to discuss these issues in their own words, and that as a result there are a few instances where they use language that may be unfamiliar or that is not usually included in classrooms or youth programs. Discussing this ahead of time provides a context for critical discussion of noteworthy terms and comments; it also offers a chance to allay educators' fears and questions about why this type of language is used, and to offer ways to talk about the language in *Straightlaced* with youth.

- *Encouragement to listen with respect*
- *Explanation of what will happen after the film*
- *Something to think about or look for while watching Straightlaced*

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS AND YOUTH SERVICE PROVIDERS

PLEASE NOTE: Immediately following the film, and before beginning an open group discussion, we strongly recommend providing a few minutes for quiet individual reflection or pair-share conversation so that everyone can collect their own thoughts and have a safe space to briefly process any personal feelings that came up. After your discussion is over, we recommend providing some type of closure – e.g. a few summary comments by the discussion leader, suggested next steps or action ideas, or a closing “check out”.

Initial responses

Who are some of the students in the film – and what are some of the comments and stories – that most stood out to you? Why?

What did you see in *Straightlaced* that reminds you of things you see in your own work with youth?

Were there students or stories in the film that triggered your own memories or raised issues that you have dealt with in your own life?

Exploring gender roles, expectations and pressures

According to the young people in the film, what are some of the ways that gender norms and expectations get set? How are these norms enforced? What is the role of schools and youth service programs in this dynamic?

What did you see in the film – and what do you see in the work you do – that speaks to the intersections of gender, race, culture and sexuality?

What were some of the pressures students in the film talked about in relation to dating, sex and relationships? What support do you think young people need to deal with these pressures in a healthy way?

Why do you think that stepping outside of gender norms is so often associated with homosexuality? What are some of the connections between attitudes about gender and attitudes about gay and lesbian people?

Gender identity and stepping outside the box

What is your own analysis of gender?

a) Do you think it's something people are *born with* or something that *society* places on us?

b) What do you think of the statement: *"My experience is that there's not two genders, there's really a spectrum"*? What have you seen in your work with youth that speaks to this?

c) How do your own beliefs about gender shape the ways you respond to young people who may not fit traditional gender roles or norms?

What were some of the reasons youth gave for defying gender norms or norms about their sexuality despite the consequences? What were some of the consequences they faced? Do these ring true to you in relation to your work?

What do you hope that your school, program or agency will hold as its values in relation to youth, gender and sexuality? What do you think is most important to communicate to young people if they are to feel safe and supported in being their true selves?

Creating safe and inclusive spaces

In what ways do you think gender stereotyping and/or homophobia exists in your school, program or agency? What are you seeing or hearing that might be closed minded about gender or sexuality? How are these dynamics affecting youth – both youth who may be the direct targets of prejudice/bias and those who are not?

One student in the film, after detailing several incidents of severe harassment, notes that he wasn't able to get the kind of support he truly needed from his teachers – even those who were concerned and understanding: *"I had a group of teachers on campus that I was comfortable talking with. They would listen and they were sympathetic, but none of them stepped up as an advocate for me. No one, none of them stepped up to make sure I was gonna be safe."* What does this comment bring up for you?

What can we as educators and service providers do to make schools and youth programs more accepting places where all students can be who they are? What are some things you saw in the film that worked or offer inspiration? What are some things to avoid?

What ideas do you have for taking action in relation to the issues in *Straightlaced*? What can you do personally? What would you like to see happen in your organization/institution?

Would you want to show *Straightlaced* to the youth you work with? What kind of set up would work best at your school to show the film?

Is there a way to share the film with parents – what kind of set up would work best to make that happen?