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CPYU (D) REVIEW By Walt Mueller



song/
video

“Shape of You”

by Ed Sheeran

Background/summary:

Pre-released as a single digital download on January 6, 2017, this Caribbean-flavored dance song from Sheeran’s album “÷” (*Divide*), has already topped the charts in 30 countries (including the U.S.), and as of the beginning of July sat at #5 on the *Billboard Hot 100* in its 25th week on the chart. Set in the context of a dark boxing gym and alternate outdoor industrial landscape, the official video is **rapidly approaching 2 billion views**. The video features model/dancer Jennie Pegouskie as Sheeran’s love-interest, and champion Japanese Sumo wrestler, Yama.

(D)iscover

WHAT IS THE MESSAGE/WORLDVIEW?

- The song’s title is a straightforward reflection of the song’s message. The song and video depict and promote a quickly-formed mutual male/female relational connection prompted solely on the basis of visual/physical attraction.
- In the video, Sheeran and his female interest cross paths while training in a dimly lit boxing gym. In the song, Sheeran sings of his deliberate quest to hook-up in a bar: **“The club isn’t the best place to find a lover/So the bar is where I go/Me and my friends at the table doing shots/Drinking fast and then we talk slow/Come over and start up a conversation with just me/And trust me I’ll give it a chance now.”** With inhibitions lowered due to alcohol, the couple agrees to dance.
- The dance leads immediately to each of them declaring a desire for a sexual connection. He sings to her, **“Girl, you know I want your love/Your love was handmade for somebody like me/Come on now, follow my lead.”** She follows his lead while discouraging any getting-to-know-each-other through conversation: **“Say, boy, let’s not talk too much/Grab on my waist and put that body on me/Come on now, follow my lead.”**
- The encounter quickly leads to a hook-up: **“I’m in love with the shape of you/We push and pull like a magnet do.”** Sheeran tells us that continuing sexual encounters based on visual attraction precede love: **“Although my heart is falling too/I’m in love with your body/And now my bedsheets smell like you/Everyday discovering something brand new.”**
- Reflecting and promoting current cultural trends regarding sex, dating, and love, Sheeran describes a dating relationship that follows a week’s worth of sexual encounters: **“One week in we let the story begin/We’re going out on our first date.”** The song ends with Sheeran singing his mantra of physical attraction: **“I’m in love with your body/Oh-I-Oh-I- Oh-I-Oh-I.”**



Walt Mueller is the President and Founder of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding.

(D)iscern

HOW DOES IT STAND IN LIGHT OF THE BIBLICAL MESSAGE/WORLDVIEW?

- Culture is bombarding our kids with hyper-sexual messages that lead them to equate “**love**” with sexual activity of all kinds. “**Shape of You**” both reflects and promotes the message they hear, specifically that there are no boundaries when it comes to sexuality, except for mutual consent. When it comes to sex, we are to “**follow your heart**” and your emotions, pursuing physical intimacy by doing whatever you want, wherever you want, however you want, whenever you want, with whomever you want. Increasingly, dating *may* now follow sexual hook-ups (which are increasingly random and anonymous). Contrary to these beliefs, the reality is that sex has been created by God as a good gift that He’s given to humanity. The Scriptures are clear from Genesis to Revelation: Sex *is* a wonderful and good thing that has its place: shared between one man and one woman within the context of a covenantal marriage (Genesis 1&2). Sex also has its divinely-ordained purpose: consummation of marriage, procreation, intimacy, and pleasure. We are to flee from any sexual activity which is outside of this place and purpose (Colossians 3:5; Galatians 5:19-21; I Corinthians 6:18).
- The Bible defines “**lust**” as a strong attraction and desire that can move in either a good or evil direction. In this case, Sheeran is promoting indulgence and servitude to the lusts of the flesh, which the Bible states are not of God and which war against the soul (Ephesians 2:3; I John 2:16; I Peter 2:11). Indulging lustful feelings is not only immoral, but it selfishly sabotages personhood (both of self and other), our flourishing, and the potential for full relational intimacy (both now and future).
- Culture puts a premium on physical appearances. Our boys are growing up in a culture that encourages them to view females as nothing more or less than sexual objects. Our girls are learning that they must center their lives and identities on creating a sexually attractive visual persona that is attractive and pleasing. Identity is now found in curating one’s self to satisfy “**sexual consumerism**” where we display ourselves, window-shop, purchase, consume, and then quickly dispose of that which is no longer novel. The Scriptures tell us that we have been made *by* God and *for* God. Finding our identity in anything other than Christ is idolatry (I John 5:21; Exodus 20:3-6). While humans mistakenly idolize outward appearances, we must rewrite the cultural narrative by cultivating inward character and hearts bent on faithful obedience to God (I Samuel 16:7; Proverbs 31:30).

(D)ecide

WHAT DO I DO WITH IT?

- You can be assured that the overwhelming majority of kids have seen and/or heard “**Shape of You.**” The song’s video treatment is relatively tame, using the boxing gym as a metaphorical representation of the song’s lyrical content. We recommend showing the video to students and then talking about the song’s lyrical messages, contrasting those messages with the message of the Scriptures on sex, sexuality, love, identity, personhood, objectification, and dating.
- Ask students to evaluate how Sheeran’s song reflects the movement towards “**expressive individualism**” (being faithful, true, and authentic to one’s self) in our culture, as opposed to following the way and will of Jesus Christ (being a faithful, true, and obedient follower of Jesus).
- Show the video to parents and youth workers, demonstrating how a cultural artifact serves to mirror current beliefs and behaviors. Specifically, describe the current cultural order of relationship building (hook-up, conversation, dating relationship). Then, teach them how to use “**Shape of You**” as a springboard for engaging in narrative-shifting conversations in the manner Jesus himself used: “**You have heard it said that (the erroneous cultural narrative) . . . but I tell you (the corrective of the biblical narrative) . . .**”
- Ask students to consider this quote from Os Guinness in relation to “**Shape of You**”. “**Freedom is not the permission to do what you like. It’s the power to do what you ought.**”