



LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 8 to 9
About the Author:	This lesson was taken, with permission, from the award-winning Violence-Prevention Curriculum <i>Healthy Relationships</i> , produced by the Halifax, Nova Scotia advocacy group Men For Change .

Exposing Gender Stereotypes

Overview

This is the first of three lessons that address gender stereotypes. The objective of this lesson is to encourage students to develop their own critical intelligence with regard to culturally inherited stereotypes, and to the images presented in the media - film and television, rock music, newspapers and magazines.

In this lesson students take a look at their own assumptions about what it means to be a man, and what it means to be a woman. The brainstorming and discussion sessions are meant to encourage them to ask gender-specific questions as a step in the self-reflective process. Students will begin to see how believing in stereotypes can lead to violence towards oneself and others.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- discuss characteristics of male and female stereotypes in our society;
- identify ways in which their own lives have been affected by these stereotypes; and
- identify the aspects of these stereotypes that are related to violence.

Preparation and Materials

- Flip-chart paper and markers

Procedure

Introduction:

Failing to accept ourselves for who we are can cause enormous problems. Wanting to be muscle-bound like Joey or slim like Susie could get us into trouble if our body type doesn't conform to these images. But stereotypes are more subtle than muscles and body weight. Masculine and feminine images that are portrayed in media also project their own psychological mystiques. As we grow up, our culture influences us through these images - usually without us realizing it.



Today we're going to examine what acting like a man and being ladylike means in our society. What are the gender stereotypes, and how do these stereotypes affect our relationships with others?

Ask your students:

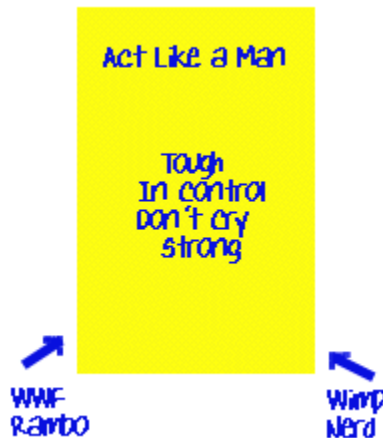
- How would you define "stereotype"?
- What are some typical examples? ("A group of teens in a store must be shoplifting," "Dumb Blondes," "Men don't cry," etc.)

These beliefs are so ingrained in our consciousness that many of us think that gender roles are natural, so we don't question them. Even if we don't consciously subscribe to them as part of our own belief system, our culture bombards us with messages about what it means to be men and women today. In these next classes, we will begin to take a good look at these influences, to step back and see how they affect our sense of self-worth and in many cases, our behavior and our choices. The most important thing to keep in mind as we reflect on this, is:

**WE DO NOT HAVE TO ACCEPT THE LIMITS OF STEREOTYPES.
WE HAVE THE POWER TO DECIDE WHAT MAKES SENSE FOR US.**

Activity 1.1

The "Act Like a Man" Box

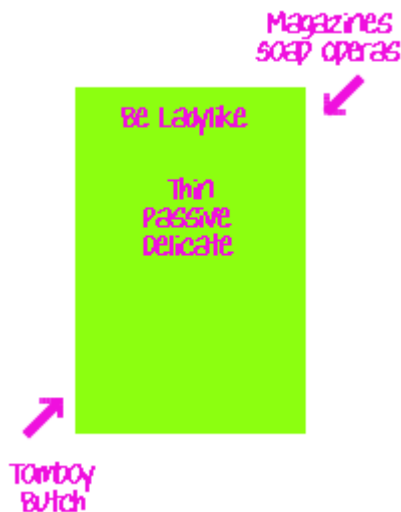


- Using image above as an example, write "Act Like a Man" at the top of the flip chart paper and record student responses. *(This will be referred to again in several upcoming activities and sessions.)*
- Ask your students: What does it mean to act like a man? What words or expectations come to mind? (Begin by directing the question to the boys. The girls can then be encouraged to respond. Attempt to record students' own choice of words. If their responses are too wordy, ask them to simplify for display purposes. If the offers are slow to come, ask them to discuss the topic in pairs, then share with the class, or make specific prompts by asking what does it mean to "Act Like a Man" in sports, business, on a date, etc.)
- Draw a box around the entire list (see example).



We're going to call this the "Act Like a Man" stereotype. Inside the box is a list of attitudes and behaviors that boys are expected to adopt in the process of becoming men in our society. Men and boys are not born this way; these roles are learned.

The "Be Ladylike" Box



- Write "Be Ladylike" at the top of a sheet of flip chart paper (to be used again in future discussions) and record student responses.
- Ask your students: What does it mean to be ladylike? What words or expectations do you think of? (Begin by directing questions to the girls. Then encourage the boys to respond. Attempt to write the students' own choice of words on the flip chart. To prompt discussion, ask about being "ladylike" in sports, business, on a date, etc.)
- Draw a box around this list.

This is the "Be Ladylike" Box. It's a stereotype just like in the "Act Like a Man Box." Its' walls of conformity are just as restrictive. Women also learn to conform to very specific role expectations as they grow up being female in our society.

Learning Gender Roles

Ask students:

- Where do we learn these gender roles?
- What people teach us these stereotypes? Entertainment? Sports? Media? (When the students respond "TV" or "movies," ask for specific examples to list.)
- Where do women learn these messages? (You may put "moms" on the paper and ask for discussion)
- What other people influence our learning of gender roles?



- Where else in society do we find these messages? (Ask for specific examples if general comments are made like "TV" or "magazines.")
- On your flip-charts, write these responses on one side of the box. You may draw arrows to illustrate how these influences reinforce the wall of the stereotype box.

How Stereotypes Are Reinforced

- What names or put-downs are boys called when they don't fit the box?
- What names are women called if they step out of the stereotype box? (Allow students to be blunt with their slang in this educational context.)
- Write the names along the bottom of the appropriate box. (You may draw arrows to illustrate how they reinforce the wall of the stereotype box.)

Ask your students:

- How do these labels and names reinforce the stereotype box?
- How does it feel when we are called these names?
- What do you think the person who is using these put-downs is feeling?

These names are used in order to hurt people emotionally, and we react by retreating to the "safety" of the stereotype box.

Evaluating the Gender Stereotypes

Ask your students:

- How many boys in the class have never cried, hands up? ("Don't cry" has been chosen from the brainstormed list of stereotypical male traits. If it was not offered during the brainstorming, select another reference.)
- Does this mean that those of you who didn't put up your hands are wimps or nerds?
- What about the girls? How many want to be passive and delicate?

In fact, we're all real people and we can experience the full range of emotions, including happiness and sadness, love and anger. The bottom line is that stereotypes are destructive because they limit our potential! Yet how many guys do we know who try hard to act like the stereotype, without even a second thought? What damage do we do to ourselves and others? Boys are not born to be violent, or have unhealthy attitudes towards girls. We learn these attitudes and behaviors through the stereotypes of what society thinks it means to "Act Like a Man," and we can free ourselves from the restrictions of these boxes once we see them as unattainable ideals. Then we can start the process of change.

This is not to say that it's wrong for guys to like sports or fix cars or for girls to enjoy cooking (cite other examples from the student-generated list). *Note: It is important to make this point in order to be sensitive to boys or girls who may feel defensive.*



The problem is that we are told that we must perform these roles in order to fit in. It is important for all of us to make our own decisions about what we do.

A stereotype rigidly confirms the belief that if you are a woman or a man, you must perform these specific roles, and do them well.

This belief takes away our personal choices in determining our own interests and skills. It also discourages men from participating in "women's work" (such as flower arranging) and restricts women from choosing roles that are traditionally "male" (such as engineering and football).

Activity 1.2: Dating Violence

Now that we've looked at the gender role stereotypes, what is it about them that leads to violence in relationships?

Sample scenario for discussion: "Biff" and "Bambi" go out on a date to the big dance at school. After the dance, they go parking. (You may ask where teens go parking and use that place name). They start necking and Biff wants to go "all the way." Bambi doesn't feel comfortable going any further.

Ask your students:

- If these two teens really believe in the stereotypes, what's going to happen next in this situation? (While asking this question, call attention to some expectations that are listed on the flip charts for men, such as "in control," or "don't take no for an answer," and for women, such as "passive" or "sexy.")
- Affirm students' responses to all possible outcomes.
- What's the worst thing that could happen in this scenario? (Date rape)
- Can you think of other situations in which trying to live up to the stereotypes would be unhealthy?
- Review the key concepts. Ask students what they learned about gender stereotypes, how they affect us and how believing in them can lead to violence.

Biff and Bambi Role Play

Background: This ten-minute role play scenario helps students to see the power imbalance created when two young people try to act out the stereotypical behavior of "Acting Like A Man" or "Being Ladylike." The participants act a role that is not true to their real selves; they are compelled to conform to the gender stereotypes. In the second scene, they do their best to model conflict resolution techniques in an atmosphere of mutual respect and concern for the other person's feelings and choices. The point of this role play is not to accomplish a perfect conflict resolution, but to highlight for the class the negative effects of gender stereotyping and to suggest the skills and attitudes that are needed in a healthy relationship.

The role play and class participation work best in a fun and supportive atmosphere. The humor that naturally arises in this context will likely highlight the absurdity of gender stereotypical behavior. Be sure to honor the role players' participation; a round of applause and a thank you at the end of their "performance" will strengthen the group's commitment to work towards gender equality.



Facilitator's Introduction: We have created a clear picture for ourselves of these gender stereotypes. (Review the meaning of this term and the gender stereotype "boxes," if necessary.) Let's have a look at what can happen if people actually try to live these impossible stereotypes.

Imagine two young people - we'll call them Biff and Bambi. They've been dating for a few weeks and they're kind of keen on each other. They aren't very skillful at creating a fair and supportive relationship because they both have "bought into" the stereotype boxes. He acts controlling. She behaves passively, always putting his wishes first.

Biff decides that the two of them will go to see a movie Friday night. Bambi has already made plans with her friends to go out for pizza.

Select an actor and actress. Make sure they understand the idea of the role play, and let them know that this is both fun and instructive. Suggest that Biff start by telling Bambi which movie they are going to see.

Give them their cue: Biff and Bambi meet in the hall at school. Now, let's see what happens...

End the role play when the action has developed the theme as far as it appears it will go. Don't leave the students stranded in an awkward moment if the role play blocks. Ask the actors to remain where they are.

Ask your students:

- What is Bambi experiencing? What is Biff experiencing?
- To each actor: How does it feel to be in this position?
- What stereotypical attitudes are they each acting out? (Refer to flip-chart list if necessary.)
- What does each character really need from this encounter? (Biff's behavior is unaware and non-relational while Bambi is self-denying and conflicted (her inner feelings and needs are at odds with her outer behavior).)
- What suggestions can you offer for them to relate better?

Scene two: Let's see Biff and Bambi try again, only this time they will make an effort to go beyond gender stereotypes. They want to get to know each other and have a relationship that is safe, supportive and fair, and based on respect and caring.

This time, the goal of their encounter in the hall is to find a solution to their conflict in a way that allows both of them to feel that they have been heard and respected. They may need to compromise.

End the role play after it has fully unfolded, unless a blockage occurs, and ask other students for suggestions.

(Don't be concerned if the students didn't come up with a fantastic solution to the conflict; in fact, the role play may demonstrate how difficult it is to find creative solutions to conflict. This is a point that could be discussed with the class.)

Ask the students playing Biff and Bambi:

- How did you feel in this scene?
- Compare how it felt to "be in character" for each of the two scenes in the role play.

Involve the class by asking:

- How did Biff and Bambi work towards a compromise that answered both of their needs?



- What difficulties did they encounter?
- Did they pay attention to the each other's feelings? If so, how were the other person's feelings acknowledged?
- Which relationship, scene one or scene two, has the best chance of growing in a healthy way? Why?

Closure: We all have a choice: we can unknowingly behave like the stereotypes in the boxes, which can lead to unhappiness, loneliness, and possibly violence. Or, we can show the courage to be ourselves and find people who accept us for who we really are. That may seem harder to do but, as today's role play has shown, it can be done. As we've seen, it makes a big difference when we listen to, and respect, the other person's needs and wants. That's a key element in healthy relationships.

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