

# **Lesson Five: Gender Stereotypes**

## **Student Learning Objectives**

The Student will be able to...

1. Define the term "stereotype."
2. Identify at least four stereotypes.
3. Name at least one way in which gender stereotypes may limit one's ability to make healthy decisions.

## **Agenda**

1. Introduce the lesson
2. Gender Box Brainstorm using the Gender Boxes Worksheet
3. Analyze the Brainstorm
4. Small Group Scenario
5. Have Small Groups Report Back to Class
6. Summarize the Lesson's Major Concepts
7. Administer Sexual Attitudes Survey

**Stereotype:** an idea or image about an entire group of people. Although the stereotype may be true for a few members of the group, it is assumed to be true for all members.

For example, one stereotype is that teenagers are lazy. Although there certainly are teenagers who don't do much (just as there are people of all ages), most teenagers are active and productive.

For these next few lessons we will be learning about decision-making, and how good decision-making can help us in our relationships and in taking care of our health. Gender stereotypes are an important part of this discussion because they can impact how we make decisions. Let's start with a brainstorming activity about gender stereotypes.

### **"Act like a Man"**

If someone is told to "act like a man," what does that mean? What are some of the stereotypes we have about how men should act?

Some examples are: tough, in control, strong

### **Clarifying Questions:**

How are "real men" supposed to act?

If we were watching a movie, what would the leading man in the movie be like?

What are some things that boys are taught about being a man?

What messages do boys' toys give them about who they should be as they get older?

How do "real men" communicate? What about relationships? What about sex?

If this is how a man is supposed to act, then what kinds of things are men and boys called if they step outside of this box?

Some examples might include: fag, sissy, girly, weak, wimpy, gay, weird, queer

If someone is told to “act like a lady,” what does that mean? What are some of the stereotypes we have about how females should act?

Some examples are: nice, polite, emotional, takes care of others

If this is how a female is supposed to act, then what kinds of things are women and girls called if they step outside of this box?

Some examples might include: lesbian, gay, dyke, ball-buster, bitch, ugly, uptight, weird, queer

How do these words keep people in the box?

What kinds of things do people do to keep others in the box, besides name-calling? Are there specific behaviors you can think of? (Answers could include: bullying, harassment, spreading rumors.)

Obviously, these are offensive words about men and women. You probably also noticed that many of these words are hurtful or offensive words about gay people. When men and women don't act like people think they should, they are often labeled gay or lesbian, and in this situation, these words are meant as insults.

These words also reinforce harmful stereotypes about gay and lesbian people, and can cause people to act in stereotypical ways out of fear that they will be labeled as gay or lesbian.

Fear, discomfort and hatred of gay and lesbian people is called homophobia, and you can see here how homophobia even affects people who are not gay, by pressuring people to “act like a man” or “act like a lady.” Does that make sense to everyone?

### **Analyzing the Brainstorm:**

The reason we're all so familiar with these stereotypes is because we are always being taught what is a “real” man or “real” woman. Of course, some of these qualities are true for some people – some women are very nurturing, or some men are strong. They are still stereotypes, however, because we expect ALL men and women to act this way, and of course all of these qualities are not true for all

men and women.

Where are some places we get messages about what it means to be a man or woman? (Answers should include things like: movies, tv shows, commercials, and also may include: my family, religion, and school.)

It sounds like these messages come from lots of different places, and we get these messages all the time. We could also say that some of these messages are so pervasive that they have become “cultural values,” which means that they are woven into the U.S. culture as expectations that are solely based on your gender. Of course not everyone who lives in the U.S. is from here originally, although there are many other cultures that have similar values to these. Regardless, anyone who lives in the U.S. is influenced by the dominant cultural values that exist here, to some extent.

When something becomes so pervasive that it is a cultural value, it can influence all areas of our lives, including dating, sex, and relationships. U.S. cultural values about gender can sometimes limit people or even lead them to make unhealthy decisions.

It is important to note that there is nothing inherently wrong with these values. It’s great to be strong or to be polite. The problem is when all men or women are expected to behave in these ways, and when they are expected to ALWAYS behave this way. What about the moments when you are not strong, or you need to be assertive instead of polite? That’s when these values can be limiting.

### **Small Group Scenario Activity**

Example:

**Felicia complains to her friends when her boyfriend hurts her feelings but doesn’t tell him.**

What cultural value, or values, is likely influencing Felicia’s actions? Let’s look at the Gender Stereotypes and Dominant Cultural Values Handout. Which of the values from this sheet do you think is influencing Felicia’s actions? (Answers could include the value of

politeness or emotions.)

How could she use the same value (or a different cultural value) to help express her feelings to her boyfriend? (Answers might include: she could use the value of emotion to express her feelings to her boyfriend; she could use the value of politeness to keep her boyfriend informed of how she's feeling; she could use the value of taking care of others to tell her boyfriend what she's feeling in the interest of keeping their relationship healthy.)

### **Sexual Attitudes Survey**

I want to take just a moment to give you all a survey to complete.

The survey has 5 statements, with two columns next to it. You will see that the first column is for you to record how YOU feel about the statement, and the second column is for you to record how you think other people your age would answer the question.

There are no right or wrong answers, just write what you honestly think and **DO NOT** put your name on it.