

Spotting stereotypes

Time: 15 minutes

Materials:

- Media clips and/or images
- [Genderbread person image \(Optional\)](#)

Prepare Ahead

- Find media clips or images from TV shows or movies that are popular for this generation of students
 - Include examples that illustrate stereotypes relating to gender and sexuality
 - Consider including some examples that challenge stereotypes

Instructions

- Explain that sometimes we make assumptions about the people around us. Often times, our assumptions are oversimplified ideas about a group of people based on little information about who they are. This is called a stereotype.
 - Explain that sometimes stereotypes seem pretty harmless, but they can be very damaging
- Where do you think stereotypes come from?
 - Sometimes they are learned from our peers, our families, our teachers and coaches, etc. Sometimes they are learned from the media and/or in society.
- Explain that sometimes stereotypes relate to things such as gender or sexual orientation.
 - **Optional:** Display the Genderbread person image to illustrate the distinction between gender, sex, orientation, and expression.
- Show images or clips from media (preferably sourced from scripted TV and film) and initiate a discussion using the following prompts as needed:
 - How is gender represented?
 - How is sexuality represented?

E.g. mostly heterosexuality; some homosexuality represented in media; both hetero and homosexuality are often represented in stereotypical and exaggerated ways. Heterosexuality is represented in very gendered ways (heteronormativity). Heterosexual men are represented as initiators of sex and in behaviours that celebrate promiscuity and a

high sex drive. Heterosexual women are represented in a positive light as chaste or as consenting to one man's sexual advances, and in a negative light as promiscuous.

Homosexuality is often represented as exceptional to a heterosexual norm. Homosexual couples in presence of heterosexual couples are often depicted as making one or more of the others uncomfortable if they display any affection, but the reverse does not occur. For example, in early episodes of *Modern Family*, Jay knocks and closes his eyes before entering any room in which Mitchell and Cam are because he does not want to see them kissing). What message does this send?

Homosexuality is represented as something that has to be announced or admitted ("coming out") but rarely do we hear of heterosexual adolescents having to announce their sexuality. What message does this send?

- **How is gender and sexual expression represented?**
 - Very stereotypically.
 - Femininity expressed through clothing, grooming (e.g. make-up, long, styled hair), colours, movement (graceful), talking, being responsible, being overly cautious, being sensitive or overly sensitive.
 - Masculinity expressed through clothing, grooming, colours (blues, greens, reds, and neutrals), movement and posture, aggression, athleticism, physical strength, being silent (and resenting talking), being irresponsible or immature, being fun and adventurous, being insensitive
 - Homosexual men expressing themselves in feminine ways
 - Homosexual women expressing themselves in masculine ways
 - Heterosexual men expressing themselves in masculine ways and being put down for showing any feminine tendencies (including crying or being well-groomed) or lacking athleticism
 - Heterosexual women expressing themselves in feminine ways and being celebrated for masculine behaviours (e.g. building something using power tools), and athleticism is celebrated but treated as unexpected or a surprise

- **How are friendships represented?**
 - Often homogeneous (males friends with males, females with females, except homosexual males are often shown as being friends with females)
 - What happens when friendships between a heterosexual male and a female are shown? Often end up in a romantic relationship.
 - Do we see friendships between heterosexual and homosexual males? What about heterosexual and homosexual women?

- Ask students to consider whether stereotypes are only present in TV shows and movies, or if they have noticed stereotypes in other places in the media (e.g. sports, social media, music, print media, etc.).
- Provide examples of how gender stereotypes or expectations about gender roles exist in sports:
 - Competition is gender-based, with the assumption that male athletes are superior in their athletic skills and/or strength
 - The most highly paid and commercially popularized professional sports/athletes are male
 - Female athletes are often shown wearing make-up while they play sports
 - Inappropriate questions that female athletes often experience. For example: Eugenie Bouchard being asked about her dream celebrity date in an on-court interview after advancing to the semi-finals in the Australian Open in 2014 (the first Canadian to reach semi-finals at the Australian Open) and being asked to "give a twirl" in an on-court interview after winning her match at the Australian Open in 2015.
- Ask students to consider how stereotypes are present in marketing.
 - How are toys, activities, foods, clothing, shows, bands, etc marketed?
 - Are certain things marketed towards boys? Girls? How do companies do that? What happens when they do that?
- Conclude with a discussion about how stereotypes affect how we think, feel, and interact with others
 - Have students consider how they can be an ally and create a supportive and inclusive environment that is comfortable and safe for everyone.

Variations

- This activity can be extended by presenting students with different characteristics and behaviours and asking students who we would assume these belong to (male, female, intersex, transgender, heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, two-spirited, etc) and why? Assumptions can include race and socioeconomic status as well. Have students reflect on what influences the assumptions they have made about those characteristics.
- Have students find examples of print, video, or audio media promoting healthy behaviours and/or healthy representations (e.g. of relationships, gender, sexuality)