



## LESSON PLAN

**Level:** Grades 8-9  
**About the Author:** From the award-winning Violence-Prevention Curriculum Healthy Relationships, produced by the Nova Scotia advocacy group *Men For Change*.

# The Impact of Gender Role Stereotypes



This lesson is part of *USE, UNDERSTAND & ENGAGE: A Digital Media Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools*:  
<http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.

## Overview

This is the third of three lessons that address gender stereotypes. The objective of these lessons 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, magazines and social networks. The lesson begins with a discussion about how self-violence may be promoted by the fashion industry, as well as on social media when men and women put their health at risk to attain impossible standards of attractiveness and thinness. Students also explore how stereotypes about masculinity can fuel male violence.

## Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- recognize the potentially damaging effects of living up to stereotypes, and how they can lead to abuse and violence against ourselves and others;
- understand that "going along with the crowd" can involve sacrificing one's own principles (which is one way of being aggressive towards oneself), as well as infringing on the rights of others;

## Preparation and Materials

- Prepare to project or distribute *Images of Media Stereotypes*
- Prepare to distribute the handout *Gender and Eating Disorders Statistics*
- Prepare to distribute the assignment sheet *Think Outside the Box*

## Procedure

### Dying to be Thin

- Start by distributing or projecting *Images of Media Stereotypes*



Ask students:

- How do these people live up to the "ideal" standards found in the stereotype box (from the lessons *Exposing Gender Stereotypes* and *Learning Gender Stereotypes*)?
- How are they successful at 'performing' their gender according to these norms?
- What do they think is the connection between stereotypes like this and eating disorders?
- Do you think women would want to be thin if they were not bombarded with thin images of women, like these, in the media? Would men want to be thin and muscular if they did not see these images?
- How do White standards for body image differ from standards for other cultural groups, such as: African Canadians, Inuit or various Asian cultural groups? (*Consider that the vast majority of models/influencers are White or have light skin.*) **Note:** *In some cultures, heavy body weight is considered to be a sign of beauty and healthiness!*
- What about at different times in history? Have these body types always been the ideal? (*Paintings that pre-date this century often depict full-bodied women. The women Matisse painted would not be thought of as thin today! Until fairly recently, only 'action' movie stars were expected to be heavily muscular; now almost all male actors are.*)

Explain to students that women's preoccupation with the beauty myth is evident in most cultures that consume television and other media influences, like social media such as Instagram. Excessive dieting can not only damage the organs by robbing the body of essential nutrients, it can cause death. The "dying to be thin" mindset also fosters a very unhealthy set of attitudes, which affect relationships, both now and in the future.

Distribute the handout *Gender and Eating Disorders Statistics* and go through it with the class. Ask them if any of those statistics surprised them or if they make them see anything raised in the discussion so far differently.

### **Inquiry: The more muscles the better, right?**

Now ask students:

1. Do you think boys are pushed to look a certain way by representations in the media? Can you give an example?
2. Are gender stereotypes and body image thought of as something that only happens to girls? Why or why not?
3. Why is a man's physical stature linked to aggression? Is this a gender stereotype?
4. Do you think gender stereotypes can be detrimental to men's mental health?
5. Why might boys and men not seek help if they experience eating disorders?
6. How much are boys and men's self-image influenced by media images like those in *Images of Media Stereotypes*?



Explain to students that the violence we can do to ourselves if we unknowingly accept these stereotypes can be very subtle. We don't have to look like Hollywood actors or social media influencers. They put a huge amount of effort into maintaining a certain look, and they get paid lots of money for their trouble. What does that have to do with us? We're leading ordinary lives in the real world, yet for some reason we have a hankering to be like them. It's important to understand why there are so many women who are suffering with eating disorders. First, it can help us avoid falling into the same pitfalls, and, secondly, it can help us feel empathy for those who do suffer from these disorders.

### **Assessment Task: Think Outside the Box**

Distribute the assignment sheet *Think Outside the Box* and go through it with the class. Explain that they will be choosing four media characters who are the gender they identify as, two who fit well in the “gender box” and two who do not. (Tell them that these can include real people such as influencers, streamers or YouTubers so long as they feel they can make judgments about this person’s character and personality.) For each of these they will identify two things they admire and two things about the character that they would *not* want to be like—for instance they might admire a character’s strength but not like their bad temper.) They will then summarize the eight characteristics they admire and write a paragraph about how easy or difficult it would be for them to be like that.



## Think Outside the Box

For this assignment, you will choose **four media characters** who are the same gender you identify as: two who fit well in the “gender box” (that is, who fit stereotypes of that gender) and two who do not.

- These can include real people such as influencers, streamers or YouTubers so long as you feel they can make judgments about this person’s character and personality.

For each of these you will identify **two things you admire** about this character and **two things about the character that you would *not* want to be like**—for instance you might admire a character’s strength but not their bad temper.

**Character name:**

How well do they fit in the “gender box”? Why?

Two things you admire about them:

Two ways you would **not** like to be like them

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**Character name:**

How well do they fit in the “gender box”? Why?

Two things you admire about them:

Two ways you would **not** like to be like them



Now go back and take a look at the eight characteristics you admire about those characters.

Think about what it would be like to try to *be* those eight things. Which ones would be easy? Which ones would make *you* fit better or worse in the 'gender box'? Why?

Write a paragraph below, or on lined paper, answering those questions.



## Gender and Eating Disorders Statistics

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- Every 62 minutes one person dies as a direct result from an eating disorder in the United States.
- Studies have found that around 50% of American 13 year olds are unhappy with their weight. This number grew to nearly 80% by the time they were 17.
- Sarah Ziff, the founder of the Models Alliance, states in a Vogue interview that “62% of models polled reported being asked to have to lose weight...[and that these models] were already considered underweight by the World Health Organization’s standards”
- About 1 in every 30 women in Canada will suffer from either anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa in her lifetime
- According to Statistics Canada in 2016, around 1 million Canadians have a diagnosis of an eating disorder.
- In Canada, between 12% and 30% of girls and between 9% and 25% of boys aged 10-14 report dieting to lose weight.
- Men and boys also experience eating disorders: 0.2-0.3% of the Canadian male population will have anorexia in their lifetime, 2.1-2.5% will have bulimia and 1-3 % will have a binge eating disorder.
- Eating disorders have traditionally been seen as a “female issue,” which means that many young men and boys who experience these disorders never seek help.
- Some men also experience “muscle dysmorphia,” in which they become preoccupied with how much muscle they have. They start to see their body in a negative way because it does not have enough muscle, which in turn affects how they see themselves as a man and how they feel they fit into their gender stereotypes. This condition leads to men using anabolic steroids and other substances to achieve better results, which have harmful affects on organs within their bodies.





## Images of Media Stereotypes





