



## LESSON PLAN

**Level:** Grades 8 to 9

**About the Author:** This lesson was taken, with permission, from the award-winning Violence-Prevention Curriculum Healthy Relationships, produced by the Halifax, Nova Scotia advocacy group [Men For Change](#).

# Learning Gender Stereotypes

## Overview

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This is the second 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 and magazines.

The lesson begins with a review of stereotypes that are associated with men and women and their possible sources - including the role of the media. Students deconstruct a series of advertisements based on gender representation and answer questions about gender stereotyping about articles they have read.

## Learning Outcomes

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Students will:

- understand the importance of distinguishing between fantasy (what happens on television, in the movies, and in ads) and reality (what really goes on in their lives).
- understand that stereotypical perfection is illusory and unreal.
- recognize the futility and the harmful effects of striving to attain stereotypical perfection.
- appreciate the benefits of celebrating who they really are.

## Preparation and Materials

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- have students bring in magazine ads depicting men and women together
- Act Like a Man/Be Ladylike flip charts (from the lesson *Exposing Gender Stereotypes*)
- overhead transparencies or copies of comic book ads
- copies of activity sheet *Media Messages* for each group
- overheads *The Insult that Made a Man out of 'Mac'* and *Pick a Fight After School*
- handouts *Sex, Violence and Advertising*, *Analyzing an Ad* and *Women's Magazines Send Us a Strange, Confusing Message* for extension activities.



## Procedure

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### Background:

From infancy, our culture teaches what it means to be a boy or a girl. From the colour of clothes to the toys we play with, the messages begin at a very early age. Young people are influenced by a barrage of messages to conform to a variety of expectations, to buy this widget, and to preserve a rigid set of values that stress the differences between genders.

The world of make believe as it is presented on TV and in the movies - from thriller films to soap operas on television - has a big effect on the viewer. Even though the plot and characters are fictitious, the underlying attitudes and messages are not. They communicate cultural values, which shape the way we think and the way we interact. Understanding this, it is important to begin to unmask a double standard that is pervasive in our culture. The dichotomy is that we buy into the stereotypes that reinforce abuse, while trying to "root out" violence in our community.

In order to combat this destructive hypocrisy, students must begin to ask questions, rather than passively accepting whatever they see and hear. Recognizing media myths for what they are is a good first step. The objective here is to draw a thick line between the stereotypical behaviour of TV, film, and video heroes, on the one hand, and our own lives, on the other.

### Activity 2.1: Messages from Magazine Ads

#### Facilitator's Introduction:

Last time we exposed the gender stereotypes in the Act Like a Man/Be Ladylike Box, and what it meant to be outside them. We concluded by naming some of the influences in our lives that can teach us or pressure us to fit into these stereotyped ideas of what it means to be a man or a woman. In today's activity, we're going to explore how the media helps to build these stereotypes.

- display the flip chart sheets from Act Like a Man/Be Ladylike, in the lesson *Exposing Gender Stereotypes*, for reference.

Ask your students:

- How can parents pressure us to act like a man? (*Preference for the colour blue, as opposed to pink, "don't cry," "be strong," go out for sports, etc.*)
- What about being pressured at home to be ladylike? (*"Don't get your hands dirty," "have good manners," develop the right interests like cooking, decorating, tidying up the house, etc.*)

It's easy to see that our parents encourage us to do certain things, like going out for sports if we're boys and paying more attention to our wardrobe if we're girls. The way the media influences us is not always so obvious.

- What do we mean by "media"? (Write students' definitions on the chalkboard and list examples under the areas of television, films, videos, newspapers, magazines, and radio.)



**Discussion:**

The media, in whatever form, is a business that sells information and reaches millions of people. The partnership between advertisers and the media dates back to the eighteenth century when the first advertisement appeared in a newspaper (a slave owner requesting the return of his lost "property").

Advertisers have since developed a multi-billion dollar industry to convince consumers (like us) that we need to buy their products. The Pepsi/Coke wars are a recent example of how marketers rally for the buying public's attention and loyalty. Statistics tell us that we see 350,000 ads by the time we graduate from high school. How this influences our attitudes is rich material for social scientists. One thing is for sure: ads do influence our choices when we go to buy something. But the influence of advertisements is tricky to deal with because they affect us subliminally.

We often see ads that feature superficially beautiful or "desirable" models, so it comes as no surprise that sexual imagery is used to sell products. But depicting people this way can also contribute to gender stereotypes. Today, we're going to take a look at some media messages that tell us how to be a man, and how to be a woman.

- Display on an overhead: *The Insult that Made a Man out of 'Mac' and Pick a Fight After School* comic book ads.

Ask students:

- Do you think the message to act like a man has changed in the twenty years between the publication of these two comic book ads?
- Organize students into working groups of four to six. Distribute the Activity Sheet Media Messages and the magazine ads they brought.

**Instructions:**

These ads were taken from popular women's and men's magazines. Answer the questions, bearing in mind there are no right or wrong answers - just write down what the picture means to you. Don't spend much time on each question; just write your first impressions, and go on to the next one. (*Note: For question 6, ask students to refer to the stereotype boxes on the board.*)

Question 7 may be difficult for students to answer. It may be necessary to point out that, by association, advertisers depict people who look like they have it together so that their products will look desirable to the consumer.

**Procedure options:**

- Have students come forward one group at a time to relate how the ad portrays the stereotypes in the box.
- Ask a student from each group to read answers to questions and record their responses on the board or flip chart for comparisons.
- Hand out flip chart paper to each group.
- Have students draw the outline of a female and a male, and fill in the outline with the expectations or stereotypes projected by the ad.
- Present and display their results for the class to see.



**Closure:**

Ask students:

- What common themes are present in all of these ads?
- What are these ads saying about roles for men and women?
- How do you think these ads can affect our attitudes and our expectations for gender roles?

**Extensions:**

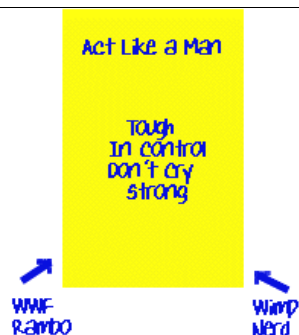
Homework assignment: Provide additional copies of the *Media Messages* activity sheet and ask students to find, and bring in, magazine ads that portray sex role stereotypes to share with the class.

Hand out news articles: *Sex, Violence and Advertising* and *Women's Magazines Send Us a Strange, Confusing Message* for discussion.

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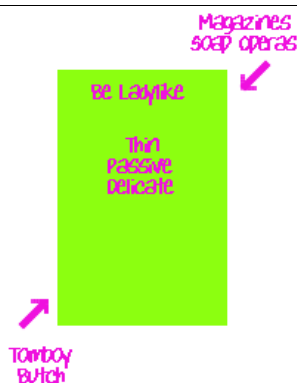
## The "Act Like a Man" Box



- 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 behaviours 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.



4. b. What is the attitude of the woman?

5. What words or ideas from your stereotype box are represented in this ad?

6. Who is the target market audience they are trying to reach?

7. How do advertisers play upon our need to be accepted - to fit in - to get us to buy their product?



## The Insult That Made a Man Out of Mac

On this and the next page are advertisements from the inside covers of comic books typically read by young boys: *Combat Stories* comic from 1972 and a *Superman* comic from 1992.

Has the message to act like a man changed in twenty years?

In what ways has the message remained the same?

**THE INSULT THAT MADE A MAN OUT OF "MAC"**

HEY! QUIT KICKING THAT SAND IN OUR FACES!  
THAT MAN IS THE WORST NUISANCE ON THE BEACH!

LISTEN HERE. I'D SMASH YOUR FACE... ONLY YOU'RE SO SKINNY YOU MIGHT DRY UP AND BLOW AWAY.

THE BIG BULLY! I'LL GET EVEN SOME DAY!  
OH DON'T LET IT BOTHER YOU LITTLE BOY!

DARN IT! I'M SICK AND TIRED OF BEING A SCARECROW! CHARLES ATLAS SAYS HE CAN GIVE ME A REAL BODY. ALL RIGHT! I'LL GAMBLE A STAMP AND GET HIS FREE BOOK!

BOY! IT DIDN'T TAKE ATLAS LONG TO DO THIS FOR ME! WHAT WRECKLESS THAT BULLY WON'T SHOVE ME AROUND AGAIN!

WHAT! YOU HERE AGAIN? HERE'S SOMETHING I OWE YOU!

OH, MAC! YOU ARE A REAL MAN AFTER ALL!

**HERO OF THE BEACH**  
GOSH! WHAT A BUILD!  
HE'S ALREADY FAMOUS FOR IT!

**Let Me PROVE I Can Make YOU A NEW MAN!**

*Charles Atlas*  
A legend the like of 'Em World's Best Particly Developed Man.'





# Pick A Fight After School.



After a hard day at school, have you ever just wanted to go home and break a few heads? Destroy a couple of cities? Or just blow up the entire universe? Of course you have. And now you can without getting grounded. Just plug in any one of these four smash arcade hits on your Atari 7800 system. And get ready for the fight of your life. **ATARI 7800**



## Sex, Violence and Advertising

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### Saint Mary's prof critical of de-humanizing images

By Rob Roberts  
*The Daily News*  
 July 22, 1991

She is naked, slung over the man's shoulder. He is naked, too, but muscular and dominant, carrying her toward the woods.

Chris McCormick knows that the ubiquitous ad for Obsession cologne grabs our attention.

"People see so many ads, they become so de-sensitized, and it makes them stop and look," says McCormick, an assistant sociology professor at Saint Mary's University.

A sly, elusive blend of sex and violence is becoming a popular marketing tool, he says. Not only for cologne, but for clothes, alcohol and other goods.

McCormick says the very subtlety of these ads is deceptive and what makes them dangerous.

There's a lot of really implicit subtle, violence and it occurs over and over again in these ads. Once you start looking for it, once you educate yourself to see it, you realize it's there all the time," he says.

### 100 magazines

"It's tied to sex, so what it does is 'sexualize' violence. It almost makes violence desirable, or at least makes violence acceptable as part of that package of desire and pleasure."

McCormick studied ads from 100 magazines he bought in December 1990. He bought *Business Week*, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Family Circle* and 96 more of North America's most popular magazines.

Some are obvious. McCormick says he has collected many ads showing women smiling as they are being hit.

"There's one that comes to mind," he recalls. "It's a picture of a woman, very close up, all you saw was her neck and her head, and her face is slightly turned toward us. There was this liquid and a bunch of peaches hitting her in the side of the head. It was an advertisement for Peach Schnapps, and the caption read 'The Flavor's Gonna Hit You.' And she was smiling, she was enjoying it. "

### Ambiguity of ads

An ad for Drambuie shows an attractive woman through a Venetian blind, with a shadowy man in the hallway behind her. The caption is "Taste the Intrigue."

The ad's ambiguity - Is it fun or fear? Is she being shadowed by her lover or an unknown attacker? - scares McCormick. "Maybe it's an affair, maybe it's intriguing. But I think linking a suggestion of violence to the suggestion of sexuality, makes it very dangerous," he says.



Ads for Guess? Jeans include a lot of "symbolic sexual assault," McCormick says. Women are pictured as being held against their will, he says and looking "bereft" in what McCormick says is supposed to be the aftermath of rape.

Many of the violent sex ads occur in fashion and cosmetics ads aimed at women, he says.

"There's a new product, Kikit Jeans, I believe, which has very violent ads," McCormick says. "Men with guns, men holding women back by their hair, women being tied back to posts. Very extreme violence, very explicit violence."

Consumers should educate themselves to what they are seeing, he says. Many people McCormick knows don't notice the ads until he points out their implications.

"We never see men in these positions," he says. "We never see men upside down, we never see men being tied up, we never see men being assaulted by women, we never see men being hit by men, being hit by things in the head. We certainly wouldn't see men enjoying it. "

Sometimes it's less obvious. McCormick also targets less offensive ads that show male domination. Many cleanser ads in homemakers' magazines tend to show only women doing housework and perpetuate gender stereotypes, he says. Many ads simply show the man dominating sexually, acting for their own pleasure and not the woman's, says McCormick.

There are some new age ads by companies like Benetton and Johnny Walker, which use racial and gender equality to sell their wares.

"A lot of them trade upon very traditional themes like romance, of course," McCormick says. "I mean, that's what Johnny Walker is about, heterosexual romance."

Even the new age ones are troublesome, though, with 90's dads still in dominant roles, he says.

"Usually the men are very masculine. They have big muscles or they're very successful. Being shown as sensitive doesn't compromise the masculinity, and that's interesting that the only way you can show a sensitive man is if he's already successful in other ways of being a man."

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#### Questions:

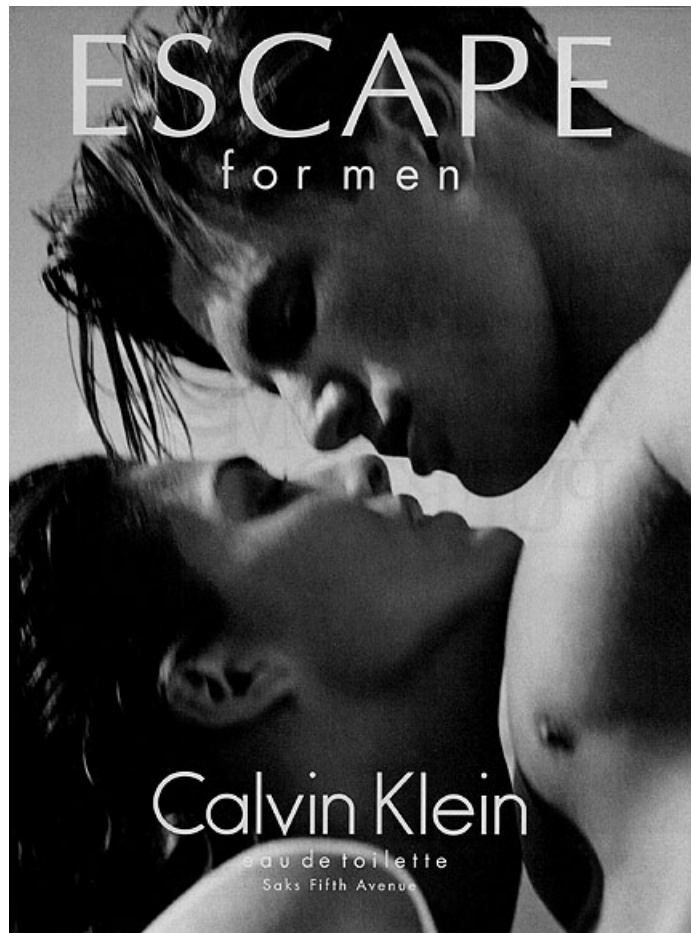
1. **What does Dr. McCormick mean, "People see so many ads, they become desensitized?"**





## Analyzing an Ad

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This ad from *Mademoiselle* magazine is directed at young women. What stereotypes apply?



## Women's Magazines Send Us a Strange, Confusing Message

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by Sandra Porteous

*The Daily News* Feb. 22, 1993

A recent U.S. study indicates viewer appetite for news has increased substantially over the past year. CNN satisfied a hunger for current information and the president of another American network said it has plans to launch several news programs because of demand. "Viewers feel there are many serious issues out there and they want more information," he said.

In Canada, the situation is much the same with the economy and environment falling apart at the same rate. There are many problems that need solving. Perhaps it's time to analyse whether marketing boards can effectively operate on the competitive world stage. Maybe we should give more thought to how the Senate could be made more effective. It may be time to press our local governments for job creation programs.

But - according to what is affectionately referred to as "women's magazines" - all that serious stuff might just fill a girl's head.

When Canadian women are struggling to be taken seriously in a world where they earn only 72 cents of every dollar earned by a male, there are women's magazines. Like those little pillbox hats Jackie Kennedy wore, they stand unchanged. The top stories still focus on looking good, cooking great and decorating even better. If you can whip up a really yummy meal in an outfit that is co-ordinated with your blush and somehow burn calories while you do it, the world is your oyster.

Last month, I picked up an issue of *Esquire* magazine because of a profile on former KKK member and political hopeful David Duke. The clerk who took my money mentioned what a great magazine it was. "It's a terrific men's magazine. Good articles - do you read it?" he asked with genuine curiosity. It is sad to think the whole list of magazines aimed at women have failed to see just how their readership has changed.

More women work outside the home than ever. Families are under stress because the person who used to iron the shirts and make the lasagna is now arriving home at the same time as the kids and spouse. Everyone has to pitch in and that isn't a bad thing.

Yet the latest issues of *Redbook*, *McCalls* and *Chatelaine* have a different view of what's important. One cover asks the probing question: "Are You Wearing the Wrong Size Clothes?" Golly, wouldn't you be able to tell? The big pants fall down and the tight ones rip. Of course, I went to college.

*McCall's* magazine tackles a tough issue: "Flu Symptoms: It Could Be Your Cooking." I can see it now. "Oh, honey can you try this chicken and see if it makes you feel feverish?"

Another cover promises a well-researched story entitled "The Biggest Mistake Loving Wives Make." Let me guess. Not taking the chicken out of the freezer on time and breaking it to Fred he'll be dining on macaroni? An issue of the *Ladies Home Journal* offers recipes for TV snacks and on the next page asks readers: "Are You Turning into a Couch Potato?" Not until I read the nifty recipes for TV snacks on page 15.

It is no wonder that young women are confused about the role society expects them to take. One magazine offers a fairly sensible article on Night Safety for Women and in the same issue runs a piece called "Trap Mr. Perfect." Readers



