

Activity: 9-10.7.2

Key Messages

- Gender is shaped by society and is not a fixed construct.
- Beliefs about gender may influence our personal behaviour and values around sexuality.
- It is important not to feel pressured to act out gender stereotypes in relationships if they do not align with personal beliefs and values.

Activity Details

Victorian Curriculum

Health & PE Evaluate factors that shape identities, and analyse how individuals impact the identities of others
VCHPEP142

Capabilities VCPSCSE043

Time 30 minutes

Levels 9 & 10

Equipment

- whiteboard and markers or butcher's paper and textas

Adapted from Media Awareness Network, *Gender stereotypes and body image*, <www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/lessons/elementary/body_image/gndr_stereo_body_image.cfm>. Act like a man/ Be ladylike ©Oakland Men's Project, Oakland, CA.

Man in a box

Purpose

To explore concepts around what it means to be male/female and the impact these beliefs have on young men's or women's behaviour.

Teaching Notes

Gender stereotyping encompasses attitude, behaviour and physical expectations, which are often unrealistic. Young people need to understand how these stereotypes are constructed and shaped by society. Understanding this will allow young people to reflect on their behaviour and attitudes, and explore how much they are influenced by the gender expectations of the world they live in.

You will need to deal with homophobic myths during this lesson as they are often raised as part of a discussion

Please note: This activity needs to be repeated to look at gender stereotypes for females ('Act like a lady').

Procedure

1. Write *Act like a Man* at the top of a sheet of butcher's paper, or on the board. Ask the students what words and expectations immediately come to mind when they think about what it means to act like a man. Record their responses.
2. Draw a square around the entire list. Explain that this is called the *Man in a box*. It contains all the attitudes and behaviours that boys are pressured to adopt in the process of becoming men in our society. Boys are not born this way; these roles are learnt.
3. Follow exactly the same process for the title *Act like a lady* and create a *Woman in a box*.
4. **Learning gender roles:** Ask the following questions, encouraging specific examples:
 - Where do we learn these male/ female gender roles?
 - Who teaches us these stereotypes?
 - Who influences our learning of male/ female gender roles?
 Record the answers outside the relevant square along one side.
5. **Reinforcing gender stereotypes:** Discuss the following questions, again encouraging specific examples:
 - What names or put downs are directed at boys when they don't fit in the box? What about girls?

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Procedure (continued)

- When boys hear the names, what are they being taught about what it means to be a man? What are girls being taught about being a woman?
- What are boys and girls told about gay men and lesbian women?
- Who 'polices' other boys/ men to have them stay in the box? Who 'polices' girls/ women?

Record the answers under the relevant square this time.

Please note: These names are often related to sexuality or gender (e.g. fag, wuss, dyke, gay etc.).

6. You can further the discussion by asking:

- How do these labels and names reinforce stereotypes?
- How would it feel to be called one of these names?
- How do you think the person using these put downs is feeling?
- How does fear of being labeled keep men and women in boxes?

7. **Evaluating gender stereotypes:** Discuss situations where people may be pressured to *Act like a man* or *Act like a lady* and potential consequences of this. For example, discuss:

- How might these stereotypes lead to violence?
- Do you think everyone is entitled to experience a full range of emotions?
- How can stereotypes limit your potential?
- What harm can this do?
- What can you do if someone calls you these names?