

Body Image: Gender Stereotypes



Alberta Education Health & Life Skills Program of Studies Outcomes

The student will...

- R – 8.8 Describe and explain the positive and negative aspects of conformity and dissent as they relate to individuals in a group or on a team.

Teacher Background

Body image continues to be a topic of interest in junior high as students attempt to define and discover who they are. On a daily basis, students are bombarded by messages which affect this process. Helping them to navigate through it all is important.

The activities in this lesson are intended to make students think about messages which make them stereotype male and female gender roles and appearances. The individual instructor sets the pace, meaning that if there is a particular concept that requires reinforcement, there is opportunity to use this lesson as a springboard for further discussion.

This lesson is taken in part from the Grade 10-12 *Body Image Kit*. The Grade 7-9 *Body Image Kit* contains more activities you can use in your classroom for further expansion of this topic. Contact information for the *Body Image Kit* is in the Reference section at the end of this lesson.

Objectives

Through the use of group activity and assignments, participants will:

- Discuss male and female stereotypes common in our society.
- Understand and respect personal difference that exists within genders.

Materials

- Handout: *Ground Rules*

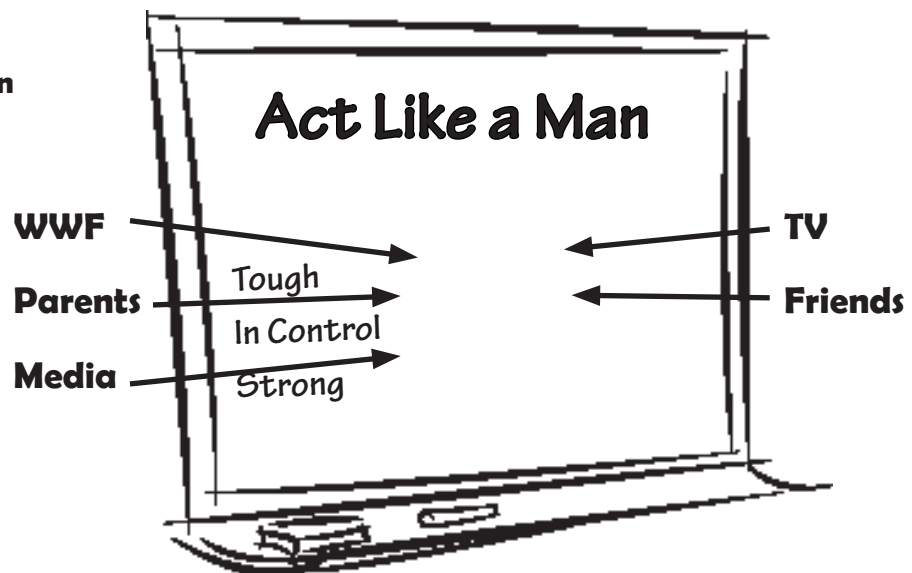
Get Ready

- Introduce today’s session, e.g. “Today we will be discussing male and female stereotypes and how it impacts one’s sense of self. Let’s begin this session by first considering what it means ‘to act like a man’ or ‘to be ladylike.’”
- Body image can be a sensitive topic to many individuals, so it is important that others be respectful of emotions and feeling that may arise. Review handout: *Ground Rules*.

Activity: Examining Gender Stereotypes

A) Act Like A Man

- Write **Act like a Man** on the board (see example)



- Ask students, “What words or expectations come to mind when asked what it means to “act like a man” in our culture (in sports, in business, on a date, etc.); e.g., strong, athletic, in control, macho, tough, dominant, real men don’t eat quiche or cry.”
- List them under the phrase and draw a box around the list. We’re going to call this the “Act like a Man” stereotype.
- Reinforce that inside this box is a list of attitudes and behaviors 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.**
- Ask the students, “Where do we get these stereotypical messages from?”, e.g., parents, media, TV, movies, peers. Write the responses on the side of the box with arrows to show how sources reinforce the stereotypes.
- Ask, “What names boys or men are called when they don’t fit the box?” Write these responses along the bottom of the box.
- These names are used in order to hurt people emotionally.

B) Be Ladylike

- Write **Be Ladylike** on the board.
- Ask students, “What words or expectations come to mind when asked what it means to ‘be ladylike’ in our culture”, e.g., innocent, quiet, dainty, petite, feminine, emotional, non-athletic, a caregiver.
- List them under the phrase and draw a box around the list. This is the “Be Ladylike” stereotype.
- Mention that this represents 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 female in our society.
- Ask, “Where do we get these stereotypical messages?”, e.g. parents, media, TV, movies, guys, other females, peers. Write the responses on the side of the box. Draw arrows to show how these influences reinforce the stereotypes.
- Ask, “What names are girls or women called if they step out of the stereotype box?” Write the names along the bottom of the box.
- Acceptance and respect for those who don’t fit the stereotypes is very important.

Discussion

- How does society reinforce the stereotypes in the box?
- What is the overall impact of these messages?
- How do these messages affect our sense of self?

Video Streaming

There are two videos in the *Grade 7-9 Body Image Kit* that can be used to initiate a discussion about certain male and female stereotypes promoted in our society, with the fundamental message being body acceptance: *Body Talk* and *Body Shapes*.

Conclusion

Through the use of group activities, we have discussed common gender stereotypes that are promoted in our society by the media. We have had a chance to explore how these stereotypes make us feel about ourselves. Finally, we have discussed ways to counteract these messages and be ourselves.

Take Home Activity

- Collect images to create a timeline for changing roles and what was considered gender appropriate during various eras, for both men and women.
- Work in small groups to create a collage that you can share in class.

Assessment Strategy

- Students will be able to describe and critically examine the common gender stereotypes in our society.

References

Alberta Mental Health Board. (2001). *Body Image Kit*. Retrieved from <http://www.bodyimageworks.com>

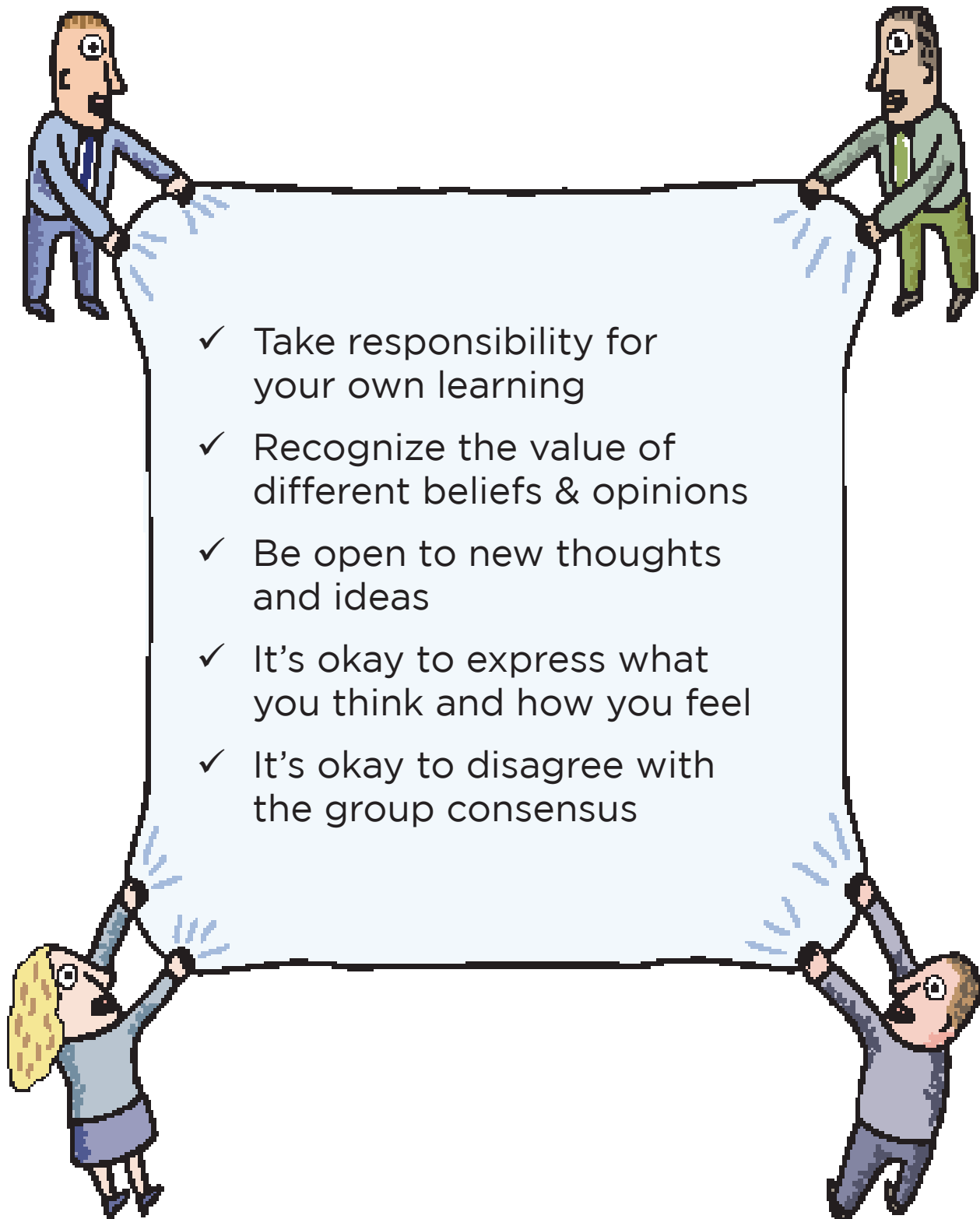
This kit contains several other activities that you could also use with your students.

**The Body Image Kit (AMHB 2001)
is free to borrow from several sources.**

Contact:

- Your school's community health nurse
- Edmonton Public Schools: Comprehensive School Health Consultant
- Edmonton Catholic Schools: Consultant - Wellness, Physical Education and Health.
- Alberta Health Services Mental Health Promotion Specialist, Addiction and Mental Health, Edmonton

Ground Rules



- ✓ Take responsibility for your own learning
- ✓ Recognize the value of different beliefs & opinions
- ✓ Be open to new thoughts and ideas
- ✓ It's okay to express what you think and how you feel
- ✓ It's okay to disagree with the group consensus