

# Exploring gender stereotypes

## Summary:

This exercise enables students to explore the concept of gender stereotypes. Students work in small groups to list as many gender stereotypes as they can think of, and then present and discuss their lists with the class.

## Learning objectives:

1. Students understand and are able to articulate what gender stereotypes are.
2. Students have an appreciation of the harm of gender stereotypes.

## Duration:

20 minutes

## Age group:

Secondary

## Materials required:

- Flip-chart paper
- Flip-chart pens

## Instructions

### Step 1: Preparation (5 mins)

- Divide students into pairs or small groups.
- Give each group a sheet of flip-chart paper and a flip-chart pen.
- Introduce the activity.

### Step 2: The brainstorm (5 mins)

- Students divide their flip chart paper in half and at the top write 'Women' on one side and 'Men' on the other.
- Students write down as many stereotypes as they can think of that are associated with women and men.

### Step 3: Feedback and discussion (10 mins)

- Invite each group in turn to stand at the front of the class and verbally present the list of gender stereotypes they produced.
- Invite students to reflect and feed back on the presentations. You could ask the following questions to prompt discussion:
  1. What's the problem with gender stereotypes?
  2. Do stereotypes reflect reality? Can they shape reality?
  3. What pressures are there on people to conform to gender stereotypes? What can happen if they don't conform?
  4. Who suffers as a result of gender stereotypes?
  5. How do the stereotypes for women and men relate to each other?
  6. How do gender stereotypes shape who holds power in society?

## Appendix 1

# Supporting information

Classroom  
Activity

*Stereotype: A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.*

- Oxford Dictionaries<sup>1</sup>

## Key observations

### What do you notice about gender stereotypes?

- **Many gender stereotypes function as direct opposites.** For example, men are associated with being strong and assertive, while women are associated with being weak and hesitant.
- **There is a power divide between gender stereotypes.** Traits or roles typically associated more with men denote having or asserting power: leader, strong, dominant, brave, assertive. The opposite of these traits/roles – which denote having or asserting less power – are associated more with women: follower, weak, submissive, fearful, hesitant.

### What's the problem with gender stereotypes?

- They can restrict people, inhibiting or preventing them from being who they want to be and doing what they want to do.
- Individuals can face penalties for exhibiting behaviour which does not conform to gender stereotypes. This penalty could be, for example, being laughed at, being judged unfairly or not being given a pay rise.
- Stereotypes foster power inequalities between women and men and can make this inequality seem 'natural'.

<sup>1</sup><https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/stereotype>