



## MEDIA SLEUTHS: EXAMINING GENDER ROLES IN ADVERTISING

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**SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL:** 3 – 5

**LENGTH OF TIME:** One 45 minute session or two sessions with one short (15 minutes) and one longer (45 minutes)

### GOAL

- To develop students' critical thinking skills to examine and question the messages in advertising.
- To develop students' media literacy around gender messaging.
- To help students understand the impact of gender marketing on gender roles and gender stereotypes.

### OBJECTIVES

- Students will explore media to examine gender stereotyping.
- Students will learn the meaning and impact of gender stereotypes and gender norms.
- Students will identify non-binary gender messages in media.

### ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. (Also SL.3.1 and 5.1)
- Social Studies Strand 4: Individual Development and Identity—Examine the factors that influence an individual's personal identity, development and actions including family, peers, culture and institutional influences.

### EDUCATORS' NOTES

Students will have an opportunity to identify and discuss stereotypical binary gender roles for people. Young people receive formal and informal messages about gender from a multitude of sources—their families, their peers, their communities and the media. Some of the messages empower them, and many of the messages can limit them.

Television, movies and advertising are examples of places in our culture that divide the world into binary expectations—socially-reinforced roles for people around their gender, divided into female and male. At school, it is important for educators to create gender-inclusive environments where children can be free to express every part of their personality and interests outside of the restrictions of the gender binary.

You may want to look at the Welcoming Schools handout [Defining LGBTQ Words for Elementary School Students](#) to read how we recommend defining the words binary and non-binary for elementary students.

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It is often important to review classroom rules about respect and being an ally when having discussions about gender. Gender-based bullying has a high frequency of occurrence in elementary schools and needs to be interrupted and addressed by educators.

The in-class activity is active and prompts many conversations about gender as students look through magazines and catalogs in small groups and notice what people of all genders are doing. It is also interesting to discover what is being marketed to boys versus girls, revealing the prescriptive power of advertising. Catalogs advertising and selling products for children are very good for this activity, as are mainstream magazines.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to develop tools for identifying stereotypes in television advertising. It involves a homework assignment that can be done most easily on a weekend. The homework is a great opportunity to engage families in critically watching television with their children. Students can watch television with a caring adult or sibling and talk about what assumptions the advertisers are making about girls and boys.

## **MATERIALS**

- Paper, pencil, glue stick
- Magazines/catalogs for the classroom, copies of the Media Sleuth TV Log Worksheet and access to television at home

## **IN CLASS ACTIVITY: GENDER STEREOTYPES IN MAGAZINES AND CATALOGS**

- Before the lesson: Prepare large chart papers: one titled “Girls,” one titled “Boys” and one titled “Both/Neither”. (This column can include non-binary.)
- (Optional with extension activity.) Ask your students to write a list of 5 to 10 of their favorite activities, their favorite color(s) and what they hope to do or be when they grow up. Say that you will be using these sheets again after they have had a chance to do some research in magazines and catalogs.
- Divide the class into small groups. Give each small group five or six magazines and catalogs. Direct the students to cut out pictures of people doing things like working, reading, driving, playing, etc. Spend about 15 minutes searching for images.
- When each group has cut out a dozen images from advertisements, have them put each picture on the chart paper on the girls, boys, or both/neither (non-binary) page.
- Have the class generate a list of descriptive words that characterize what they see in the pictures in each category. Ask the class if they have any observations about the photos themselves.
- Ask:
  - What do these photos/images say about the behavior, likes and dislikes, etc. of women and men and girls and boys? Do you see any patterns? How about messages to both/neither or non-binary adults or children?
  - What are the females doing? Where are they pictured? Are they active? Are they in powerful positions? What colors are chosen in the ads targeted to females?

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- What are the males doing? Where are they pictured? Are they active? Are they in powerful positions? What colors are chosen in ads targeted at males?
  - What are the people in the ads that are non-binary doing? Where are they pictured? Are they active? What colors are chosen in ads targeted at both, neither or non-binary?
  - Then, have students review the lists they made about themselves. Hold a discussion about whether the images they found in magazines accurately reflect their reality. What is true and not true, and what's missing?
  - Ask students how they feel about this. If the representations do not reflect their reality, then should something be done to change it? If so, what could be done?

### **HOMEWORK ACTIVITY: GENDER STEREOTYPES IN TELEVISION ADVERTISING FOR CHILDREN**

Homework: Pass out the Media Sleuth TV log sheet. Ask students to watch two children's shows on commercial television and fill in their log sheet. (Some students may not have a television. Make alternate arrangements for them to complete the homework assignment, such as with another student.)

### **IN CLASS AFTER THE HOMEWORK HAS BEEN COMPLETED**

- Tally the results by category on a large piece of chart paper.
  - How many ads are directed at girls?
  - How many ads are directed at boys?
  - How many ads are directed at both or neither?
- List what the "girl," "boy" and "both or neither" ads were selling.
- Have a discussion:
  - Do the "boy" ads imply that only boys should be interested in these things?
  - Do the "girl" ads imply that only girls should be interested in these things?
  - What category of things do advertisers believe should be for everybody? Are there more or fewer items in this category?
- Ask the students:
  - What do the ads say about the behavior or likes and dislikes of girls and boys?
  - What topics do the editors think girls are interested in? Boys? Both or neither?
  - What are the girls doing? How are they portrayed? Are they active? Are they in powerful positions? What colors are chosen in the ads targeted at girls?
  - What are the boys doing? How are they portrayed? Are they active? Are they in powerful positions? What colors are chosen in ads targeted at boys?
  - What are the people doing in the non-binary ads? How are they portrayed? Are they active? Are they in powerful positions? What colors are chosen in ads targeted at both or neither?

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- Have students review the lists they made about themselves. Hold a discussion about whether the images they saw on television accurately reflect their reality. What is true and not true, and what's missing?
  - Ask students how they feel about this. If the representations do not reflect their reality, then should something be done to change it? If so, what could be done?

### **EXTENSION ACTIVITY**

Collect the lists that students made of things they like to do, favorite colors and hopes for the future. Have students work in groups to make posters titled:

- "OUR CLASS LIKES TO..."
- "OUR FAVORITE COLORS ARE..."
- "IN THE FUTURE WE WANT TO BE..."

### **MODIFICATIONS**

- This lesson can be adapted to look at stereotyped images based on race/ethnicity. Students could also look at both racial/ethnic and gender stereotypes together.
- Ask students to seek out images that break traditional and stereotypical expectations and share them with the class or in small groups.

### **ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION**

- Ongoing teacher observation of how students are making choices and whether or not they accept student choices outside of gender expectations.
- While the students are working with each other, are they using vocabulary and showing comprehension of the concept of gender?
- Assessment for this lesson will be mostly informal. You will observe your students' reactions during class and small-group discussions. By paying attention to their conversations and individual responses, you can assess their comprehension of gender diversity and their ability to apply this comprehension by exploring their own differences.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FROM WELCOMING SCHOOLS**

[Lessons to Understand Gender](#)

[Defining LGBTQ Words for Elementary School Students](#)

[Books that Look at Gender and Support Transgender and Non-Binary Students](#)

[Resources for Gender Inclusive Schools](#)

[Be Prepared For Questions and Put-Downs Around Gender](#)

[Professional Development Training](#)

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## MEDIA SLEUTH: TV LOG WORKSHEET

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name of TV Show \_\_\_\_\_

Day \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ Channel \_\_\_\_\_

**What product is being sold in each ad?**

**Who are the targets of the ad?**

**Girls**

**Boys**

**Both/Neither**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

**What are the clues that show you who is being targeted by the ad?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

**What messages do you get from these ads about all children? About girls?  
About boys? About both or neither?**

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