# Challenging Unhealthy Representations in the Media

**Time Required** – 2.5 hrs

## Learning Objectives

- Reflecting on the gender-based stereotypes
- Learning about the role that online media -in particular social media- has in the development of these stereotypes
- Demonstrating a confident and positive sense of self and respect for the dignity and welfare of others

## Notes for Educators:

Toxic gender-based stereotypes that devalue women and girls have been identified as a root cause of child sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. The media perpetuates many of these negative ideas and our students' heavy social media/online usage means that they are regularly exposed to harmful images. Students may at first be resistant to the content of this lesson plan, as they are not only consumers of media, but also creators.

In addition, discuss how the 2SLGBTQ+ community is affected by media representations. Often 2SLGBTQ+ women will be represented as "unfeminine", gay/bi men as "too feminine" and non-binary and trans individuals will be subject to gender regulation and stereotyping.

Encourage critical thinking about how media representations impact men. Men experience pressure to follow unchallenged stereotypes such as being tough, controlling, overtly sexual, strong, independent, and non-emotional. Stereotypes against men differ from sexism because the images of men have to do with men exercising power over women and over other men.

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Students may bring up some of the division of gender roles that still exist within the Catholic Church (e.g. women cannot be priests). if you are not comfortable discussing this with your students you can table the discussion an invite your administrator priest or chaplain to a future class.

This activity also provides an opportunity to explore how diverse groups of women can be impacted in different ways through the lack of representation and stereotyping.

## Materials

- Projector
- Flipchart paper and markers (enough for each group)
- Access to computers/devices

## Reflection:

Write or post the following for students to reflect on prior to the lesson. Give students about 5 minutes to jot down ideas.

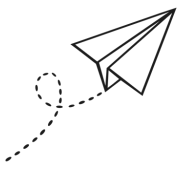
In 2021 a group of Catholic Bishops, including a cardinal and an archbishop, signed a statement of support for L.G.B.T. youth, telling them, "God created you, God loves you and God is on your side." why is this important for people who might not outwardly express themselves according to traditional gender roles? (answer, prove, extend)

## Activity One

Begin the lesson by explaining that teens are often bombarded by media images on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, video games, Youtube, etc.

Explain that these images can create toxic stereotypes of both men and women, and that these toxic stereotypes have been identified as one of the root causes of child sexual exploitation/sex trafficking.

Divide your class into groups of 4 to 5. Provide each group with flipchart paper and markers. Ask the groups to draw a line down the centre of their flipchart paper; on one side of the paper instruct them to write "Media Portrayals of the Ideal Man" and on the other side write "Media Portrayals of the Ideal Woman".



- Ask the students to think about the images of men and women they see in the media, and particularly on social media (e.g. What do the men/women look like? How do they act? How do they dress?). Ask students to generate a list of characteristics that the media most often uses to portray the "Ideal Man" and "Ideal Woman".

- After 5 minutes, have students share what their group came up with and generate a master list on the board. Responses may include:

Ideal Woman= thin, flawless, white, expensive clothing, etc.

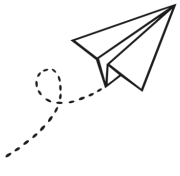
Ideal Man= rich, athletic, powerful, successful, straight, etc.

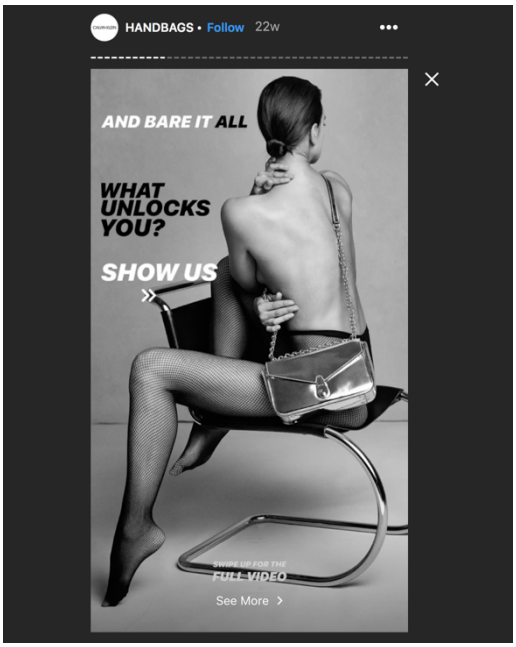
Ask students to reflect on how these stereotypes make them feel. What possible consequences could these images have for people who view them (e.g. poor self-esteem; eating disorders; the objectification of women, etc.)?

What groups are often not represented in the media (e.g. people of colour; Indigenous people; 2SLGBTQ+ people; disabled people)? What are the possible consequences of this underrepresentation? (e.g. poor self-esteem; a feeling of not belonging, etc.)

## Activity Two

Tell the students that they will now look more closely at media representations of men and women that promote toxic stereotypes. Project a current online media image/video that you feel best exemplifies this. Here are two examples:









As a class, analyze the image by answering the following questions:

- What is the message of the image? In the case of an advertisement, what is being sold?

- How does the size and appearance of the man/woman in the image compare to the size and appearance of an average man/woman? Does the man/woman look like the people you know?

- How is the man/woman positioned? *Women are often shown as looking down or away from the camera, while men are shown as looking up or forward as a*

*statement of power. Women are also often shown as leaning or supported by men, or in forced or coercive positions.*

- Is the man/woman made to look sexy in the image?
- Overall, how does this image contribute to toxic stereotypes of men/women?
- How does the image connect to enabling gender-based violence and child sexual exploitation? *Discuss how often images are used to dehumanize and objectify women, especially women of colour, and 2SLGBTQ+ identifying individuals, and how this contributes to child sexual exploitation and sex trafficking.*
- Have the way people are represented changed during the age of social media?

## Activity Three

Ask students to return to their earlier groups. Explain that their task is to go online and find media images and content that challenge toxic gender stereotypes, and create a PowerPoint/Video of these images.

Images can come from advertisements, social media content, video games, music videos, etc. Students will then present their findings with an explanation.

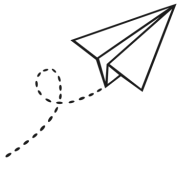
Encourage students to use the same questions you did when analyzing an image as a class.

## Wrap Up

After the presentations are complete, ask students how they can challenge gender inequality, racism and other forms of discrimination in the media. Some possible answers could include:

1) Create content that challenges toxic stereotypes of men and women

2) Engage with your social media followers in discussions about equity and diversity



3) Refrain from “liking” or “sharing” content that perpetuates toxic stereotypes of men and women

4) Be aware of the companies/individuals who promote toxic stereotypes of men and women and challenge their content

5) Be conscious not to make online comments that reinforce toxic stereotypes of men and women (e.g. commenting on someone’s appearance)

