

Selling Stereotypes

Essential Question

How do we learn about stereotypes of boys and girls from the world around us?

Lesson Overview

Students are introduced to the concept of a stereotype, and they explore the messages they receive regarding differences between boys and girls. They first watch and discuss a video of a little girl questioning why companies market boys' and girls' toys differently. Then they compare and contrast gender stereotypes portrayed in two LEGO[®] online activity zones.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to ...

- compare and contrast gender stereotypes.
- evaluate online media messages that convey gender stereotypes.
- reflect on why gender stereotypes sometimes can be limiting.

Materials and Preparation

- Review the **Gender and Digital Life Teacher Backgrounder (Elementary School)**.
- Preview the YouTube clip “Riley on Marketing” and prepare to show it to students (www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CUo4oHqbas).
- Copy the **Spot the Messages Student Handout**, one for each student.
- Preview the following websites, which students will explore in Teach 2:
 - » LEGO[®] Hero Factory (www.herofactory.lego.com)
 - » LEGO[®] Friends (www.friends.lego.com)

Note: The use of these sites is for educational purposes only and does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement.

Family Resources

- Send home the **Boys, Girls, and Media Messages Family Tip Sheet (Elementary School)**.

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Standards Alignment –

Common Core:

grade 3: RI.4, RI.7, RI.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.6, L.3a, L.6

grade 4: RI.4, RI.7, RI.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.6, L.3a, L.6

grade 5: RI.4, RI.7, RI.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.6, L.3a, L.6

NETS-S: 1a-d, 2a-b, 2d, 3a-d,

Key Vocabulary –

message: a communication of ideas or information

stereotype: an idea about a group of people that's not always true

introduction

Warm-up (5 minutes)

INVITE students to close their eyes and imagine that they are walking into a baby's bedroom. The room has blue walls. The blankets and pillows have trucks on them. The pictures on the walls have rocket ships.

ASK:

Do you think this room belongs to a baby boy or a baby girl? Why?

Students will likely associate the color blue, trucks, and rocket ships with boys. They may state that these are the kinds of things that boys like.

ENCOURAGE students now to describe a room that belongs to a baby girl. (Students will likely mention the color pink, as well as things like flowers or dolls.)

ASK:

Could girls also like trucks and rocket ships? Could boys like dolls?

Students should understand that these things are quite possible.

teach 1

How Do We Learn the Rules? (10 minutes)

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **message**.

POINT OUT that boys and girls are born with some differences. But other differences are just ideas created by people. We see and hear messages that make us think of certain things as being for girls, other things as being for boys. But these messages are not actual rules. They are just opinions.

TELL students that they are going to watch a short clip of a little girl talking to her dad at a toy store about the messages she sees around her.

▶ SHOW students the YouTube clip, "Riley on Marketing" (www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CUo4oHqbas).

Note: You may decide to play this video twice for students, especially since it starts mid-sentence. A transcript of the video is below:

Riley: ... wouldn't be fair for all the girls to buy princesses and all the boys to buy superheroes!

Father: Well, why?

Riley: 'cause girls want superheroes *and* the boys want superheroes. And the girls want pink stuff ... and the boys don't want pink stuff.

Father: Well, boys want both, but why do you think they do that?

Riley: 'cause the companies who make these try to trick the girls into buying the pink stuff instead of stuff that boys want to buy, right?

Father: Right. But you can buy either, right? Boys can buy either? If boys want to buy pink, they can buy pink.

Riley: Yes! Why do all the girls have to buy princesses?! Some girls like superheroes, some girls like princesses! Some boys will like superheroes, some boys will like princesses.

Father: Absolutely.

Riley: Well, then why do all of the girls have to like pink stuff, and all the boys have to like different color stuff?

Father: That’s a good question, Riley.

ASK:

What kinds of questions does Riley ask about the toys around her?

Riley is trying to figure out why there are such big differences between “girl toys” and “boy toys.” She wonders why companies think girls only want to buy toys that are pink or have to do with princesses, not superheroes.

Riley says that companies try to “trick the girls into buying pink stuff.” What do you think she means by this?

Guide students to consider the fact that things like toy companies and television shows send very powerful messages to kids about what is normal, popular, or desirable – both for girls and for boys.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **stereotype**.

EXPLAIN that there are **stereotypes** about differences between boys and girls. We get messages about these stereotypes from people in our lives, and at toy stores, on television, in magazines, in movies, and more.

POINT OUT that we also get messages about boys and girls online. One place we get them is from virtual worlds and websites meant for kids. Some of these sites are owned by toy companies.

teach 2

Spot the Messages (25 minutes)

DIVIDE the class into four to six groups. If possible, make sure each group contains a mix of boys and girls.

DISTRIBUTE the **Spot the Messages Student Handout**, one for each student.

DIRECT half of the groups to the LEGO® Hero Factory website. Direct the other half to the LEGO® Friends website.

READ the directions on the handout aloud to students. Instruct students to explore these websites in their groups, following the directions on their student handouts.

INVITE each group to share the T-chart that they created with the rest of the class.

ASK:

Which group – girls or boys – is the LEGO® Hero Factory site aimed at? What kinds of messages does it send about what this group is supposed to like and how they are supposed to act?

Students will likely conclude that the site targets boys. They should recognize that it sends messages that boys are supposed to be “heroes,” and that they like robots and/or outer space. The games on this site involve shooting, fighting, and creating comics. The colors on the site are dark and strong: red, blue, black, and gray. The robots pictured are big and powerful.

Which group is the LEGO® Friends site aimed at? What kinds of messages does it send this group about what they are supposed to like and how they are supposed to act?

Students will likely conclude that the site targets girls. It sends messages that girls are supposed to spend lots of time with friends. The girls on the site all look similar: big hair, big eyes, small noses, small waists, and skinny legs. The LEGO® Friends playset has girls build places such as cafés, beauty shops, and a veterinarian office. The colors on the website are light and fresh: pink, purple, blue, green. There are hearts, butterflies, and flower decorations.

DISCUSS with students why these messages are stereotypes. Encourage them to recognize that while some girls are interested in hanging out with friends, beauty shops, decorating, and cupcakes, others aren't. Also encourage students to recognize that some boys are not interested in fighting, robots, or being strong. Students should understand that girls and boys don't always have to listen to the messages they get from online media, or play only on certain sites. It's fine for girls and boys to like all kinds of things.

closing

Wrap-up (5 minutes)

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives. You may want to ask students to reflect in writing on one of the questions, using a journal or an online blog/wiki.

ASK:

What is a stereotype? Where do stereotypes about girls and boys come from?

A stereotype is an idea or message about a group of people that's not always true. Stereotypes can lead us to believe that all girls and boys should look and act certain ways. We can learn these stereotypes from the people in our lives. We also learn about these stereotypes from toys, TV shows, and lots of other places in the world around us.

What stereotypes of girls did you see on the LEGO® website? Of boys?

The LEGO® websites showed girls as surrounded by friends and interested in things like decorating, beauty, and baking. They depicted all of the "hero" robots as men. The robots are big and strong, and they are good at fighting. These qualities may be true for some girls and boys, but they aren't true for all.

How can stereotypes about girls and boys make people feel?

Stereotypes can make some people feel like they don't fit in, or that they should try to be something that they are not. Stereotypes can also encourage people to assume, or believe without question, that there are differences between groups of people.

Extension Activity

Point out to students that we can also get messages that discourage stereotypes. For example, Riley's father sends her the message that it's okay for boys and girls to like the same things. Show students the following LEGO[®] advertisement from the 1980s, which was meant to encourage all kids to buy and play with LEGOs: www.flickr.com/photos/moose_greebles/3717676645/in/photostream/.

The advertisement shows a young boy and girl standing next to each other. They are wearing similar clothing and they are holding similar LEGO[®] creations. Have students discuss the kind of message this ad sends to boys and girls. Students should recognize that the ad focuses on being proud of your work, instead of on differences between boys and girls.

Have students create a print advertisement for LEGO[®] that will appeal to both boys and girls. Ask them to think carefully about what message(s) they will send through their choices in wording and images. You may want to give students a template that has spacing delineated for a heading, an image, and a caption or tagline.

At-Home Activity

Have students find a toy commercial with their parents – either online or on TV – and discuss the following three questions with them:

- 1) Who created this commercial?
- 2) How are they trying to get our attention?
- 3) Does this commercial encourage certain messages about boys and/or girls?

Invite students to report back to the class.

What Does Gender Have to Do With Digital Citizenship and Literacy?

Imagine that you're shopping with a little girl for a Halloween costume. You see packages filled with pink princess dresses, sparkly skirts, and even bikini tops – all geared toward girls. Now imagine that you're shopping with a little boy, sifting through costumes of muscular superheroes and action-adventure characters. The messages about boys and girls that kids see in toy stores, TV shows, movies, games, apps, and virtual worlds play a powerful role in framing their sense of what's "acceptable" and what isn't. The problem is that the media often encourages narrow definitions of boys' and girls' roles. When kids absorb and accept these gender stereotypes, they can be misinformed about how the world perceives them and what they can grow up to be.

Why Does It Matter?

Overexposure to gender stereotypes can place kids' physical and mental health at risk. And because kids today are not only media consumers but also media creators, they may mirror these stereotypes while texting, messaging, posting comments, or developing their own digital works. When kids are exposed to rigid ideas about boys' and girls' roles through their peers – both online or offline – it can be hard to convince them not to adopt those ideas.

Your students need to develop media literacy skills now, not later. As elementary school educators teach kids how to read literature and informational texts, they have a unique opportunity to also equip them with media and digital literacy skills. Kids can apply questions about authorship, content, context, and validity to many different forms of digital media – online ads, websites, and even virtual worlds.

Early discussions about gender can help diffuse digital drama in the future. Preteens aren't immune to issues like online drama, cyberbullying, and even sexting. Quite often, these issues are rooted in *social* attitudes, not the technology itself. When a child chooses to be a bystander, rather than an upstander, it's often because she's concerned about social repercussions. And boys and girls face different consequences for showing separateness from their peers. If kids can unpack "gender codes" at an early age, they may be more likely to handle any drama related to them later on.

Not Your Specialty? Not a Problem!

There are more classroom connections than you think. Talking about gender roles can create an easy segue between the subject you regularly teach – whether it's history, English, or health and wellness – and a class discussion about digital citizenship. Refer to the following tips to help you get started.

SOCIAL MEDIA, SOCIAL LIFE: IT'S NOT GENDER NEUTRAL

Every day, more teen girls than teen boys text. In the daily Twitter-verse, there are also more girls than boys, and when it comes to photo posting, it's especially a girl thing...but not always a good thing.



77% TEXT DAILY

33% EVER TWEETED

75% LOVE POSTING PHOTOS



60% TEXT DAILY

22% EVER TWEETED

42% LOVE POSTING PHOTOS

For girls, especially, putting their pictures online can be stressful:



57% girls vs. 28% boys sometimes feel left out after seeing photos of others together online

45% girls vs. 24% boys worry about other people posting ugly photos of them online

28% girls vs. 9% boys have edited photos of themselves before posting

Source: *Social Media, Social Life: How Teens View Their Digital Lives* (June 26, 2012). A Common Sense Media Research Study. <http://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/social-media-social-life>

All Teachers

Know the difference between *gender* and *sex*. Gender has to do with social identities and roles. Gender is about how a culture defines terms like “masculine,” “feminine,” and everything in between. Sex, on the other hand, is a matter of anatomy and biology. For example, when you separate a class into groups of boys and girls, you’re separating them by sex, not by gender.

Get creative with Common Core. You don’t have to stray from Common Core standards to teach media literacy. There are plenty of informational texts about media messages that elementary school students can read and interpret. Also, students can expand on concepts like “the author’s purpose” and apply them to examples of multimedia. Kids should know that videos and ads represent a point of view and that they’re meant to persuade, inform, and/or entertain their viewers.

Grab headlines, and make them teachable moments. Current events – whether in politics, sports, or popular culture – can spark meaningful conversations about gender roles. Draw connections between issues in the press and your students’ everyday lives.

Debunk stereotypes about STEM and gender. Encourage kids – especially girls – to problem-solve, design, and experiment in the areas of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). Look out for any negative attitudes in your class that might encourage girls to think they’re less capable of engaging with these subjects.

Selling Sterotypes

Which website are you looking at (circle one)?

LEGO® Friends website

LEGO® Hero Factory website

Directions

Explore the website in your group. Look at:

the pictures	the videos	the style	the colors	the words	the games
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Think about the things you see. Which things seem like they are for girls? Which things seem like they are for boys?

List them in the chart below. (There are no right or wrong answers!)

GIRLS	BOYS

Take a vote! Whom do you think this website is for? (circle one)		
GIRLS	BOYS	BOTH

Selling Stereotypes

1. Look at the picture below. Who should play with these toys? A girl? A boy? Anyone?

- a) Girl
- b) Boy
- c) Anyone



Source: LEGO® Hero Factory. Web. 16 Oct. 2012. <<http://herofactory.lego.com/>>

Explain your answer:

2. Where do messages about boys and girls come from?

- a) The media (advertisements, movies, games, etc.)
- b) Our communities (family, friends, and other people around us)
- c) Both a and b

3. A “stereotype” is:

- a) An idea about a group of people that is *not always* true
- b) A website that people can listen to music on
- c) An idea about a group of people that *is always* true

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- a) Girl
- b) Boy
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Source: LEGO® Hero Factory. Web. 16 Oct. 2012. <<http://herofactory.lego.com/>>

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **c**.

Explain your answer:

Students will ideally answer that anyone can play with these toys. People may have ideas about the way boys and girls “should” act, or what they should like, but they are not rules.

2. Where do messages about boys and girls come from?

- a) The media (advertisements, TV, movies, games, etc.)
- b) Our communities (family, friends, and other people around us)
- c) Both a and b**

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **c**. Messages about boys and girls come from the world around us—our relationships with other people, as well as the characters, stories, and trends we see in media. Some differences between boys and girls are biological, but many are just ideas that people have.

3. A “stereotype” is:

- a) An idea about a group of people that is *not always* true**
- b) A website that people can listen to music on
- c) An idea about a group of people that is *always* true

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **a**. Stereotypes are based on an assumption about a group of people. They are not always true.