



Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

CHALLENGING GENDER STEREOTYPING AND HOMOPHOBIA IN SPORTS

"I think perfect objectivity is an unrealistic goal; fairness, however, is not."

—Michael Pollan

OVERVIEW

Students will define “stereotypes” and “homophobia,” identify common stereotypes they hold, and use perspective-taking to consider the impact that such stereotypes have on the fair treatment of male and female athletes.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To help students understanding what stereotypes are and how they impact others
- To encourage greater self-awareness
- To encourage greater attention to how stereotypes might produce unfair outcomes

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 1 hour

LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School

MATERIALS

- Paper
- Pencil/pen
- Article: "[Can the NFL Tackle Homophobia?](#)"
- Handout: [Stereotypes of Male and Female Athletes and Artists](#)

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Identify qualities that they associate with male and female athletes
- Explore stereotypes about gender and sexual orientation
- Understand what stereotypes are and how they harm and limit people
- Consider how to debunk stereotypes about gender and sexual orientation at school

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to reflect on any stereotypes you hold or have heard about male and female athletes. Consider how these stereotypes affect your behavior towards male and female athletes. (Perhaps focus on student athletes, if that feels relevant). How might these stereotypes impact the experiences of male and female athletes differently? What could you do at your school to develop more positive relationships that dispel stereotypes and misinformation about sports and gender? How might reflecting on the impact of such stereotypes affect the things you say or do?

INSTRUCTIONS

- In small groups, have students use books or websites to define the terms “stereotype” and “homophobia.” Have students write a one- or two-sentence definition of each word. Compare and contrast group’s definitions to make sure students understand the terms.
- Then, have each group collaboratively fill out the Stereotypes of Male and Female Athletes and Artists handout. (Please tell students that while only the terms “male” and “female” appear on the handout, some people identify with other terms such as genderqueer and transgender. However, for this discussion we will be focusing on these two terms). The handout helps highlight how being “big/strong” or “creative/intuitive” hold different meanings for males and females, and these meanings are informed by gender stereotypes of what a male or female should be. As a class, go through the handout and invite each group to share their responses.

- After reviewing the handout, have students read “Can the NFL Tackle Homophobia?” and discuss the following questions:
 - When you think back to stereotypes about male athletes, what, if anything, in the article surprises you?
 - Why do you think no professional football players self-identified as gay while they were playing pro ball?
- Finish by having students answer at least three the following questions:
 - How might the stereotypes we hold impact male and female athletes? Consider how you might feel if you were a male athlete and you were aware of the stereotypes others hold about you? How might such stereotypes influence your behavior? What sort of experiences might you encounter with others? Now, consider the same from a female’s perspective.
 - How might such stereotypes lead to unfair outcomes?
 - Do you have stereotypical ideas about gender and sports?
 - What can we do at our school to develop more positive relationships that dispel stereotypes and misinformation about sports and gender?
 - How might knowing what I know now affect what I say to people or how I treat them?
 - What have I learned? What would I like to know more about this topic?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Were students able to take the perspective of male and female athletes?
- Have you noticed a difference in student behavior? Do they act more fairly?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

[Research](#) tells us that we tend to respond more fairly and favorably towards people who appear similar to us. For instance, people tend to share more with those who hold the same social group identity (e.g., same race). We also show a tendency to [punish](#) people more harshly when they have behaved unfairly towards someone who shares our social group identity—particularly if they represent a different social group from ours (e.g., a different gender or sexual orientation). Still, [research](#) finds that perspective-taking can reduce our biased responses by increasing our perceptions of similarity with those of different social groups and helping us to see them in a more favorable light.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Although, [research](#) shows that humans have a preference for fairness, stereotypes we hold may influence our behavior in ways that we don’t always recognize, resulting in unfair outcomes. Teaching adolescents to recognize the stereotypes they may hold—and how those stereotypes might impact the experiences of others—can help reduce automatic responses and ultimately create a more positive school environment where students treat each other with greater fairness and respect.

SOURCE

[The Self, Virtue & Public Life](#), a three-year research initiative based at the University of Oklahoma. Original lesson was adapted from Learning for Justice's [website](#).