

GENDER STEREOTYPES ARE

Exploring how gender norms shift and change over time and around the world

Some young people struggle to name and express the feelings they have about gendered societal pressures to look or move in a certain way. Most young people benefit from safe spaces to express difficult feelings (e.g. anger, powerlessness, frustration) in their own peer cultures and wider relationships. These include feelings about real world issues that they have little control over such as social injustice, poverty, discrimination.

This case study is from an inner city primary school in London. The school has around 1000 pupils almost all of whom are from minority ethnic backgrounds and for most of them English is an additional language. The school already do a lot of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) work but wanted to listen and learn more about children's understandings of gender stereotypes. So, they invited Nicole Rodden, from Same Difference to plan and deliver some activities with year 5 pupils to explore this.

Did you know?

The idea that pink is a girl's colour is a recent invention. As recently as 1927 American magazines linked pink to boys.

This is a good example of stereotypes changing over time

When did girls start wearing pink?



'Gender' is used in this resource to refer to how sexed bodies are lived (e.g. as identity, as expression, through social interaction), represented (e.g. in language, media, popular culture) and regulated (e.g. by socio-cultural norms, such as the stereotypes of 'masculinity' and 'femininity', and in law).

While the concept gender can include the different ways societies assign chromosomes or body parts to sex categories, it is not synonymous with sex, and does not only refer to gender identity or gender expression.

It is a concept that allows for analyses of **gender as an organising principle of society** (e.g. how gender shapes and is shaped by economic, environmental, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors). As a concept, it also enables an exploration of how **different societies** address the intersection of biological, socio-cultural and psychological processes.

DEBATABLE



Nicole Rodden from Same Difference facilitates workshops on topics such as gender stereotyping and understanding emotions.

Did you know?

The idea that boys don't cry has changed throughout history.

It used to be expected that boys and men would cry. It was unremarkable for men to cry in the bible. Achilles cries in the Iliad. Oliver Cromwell cried in public.

Read more about it [here](#).

We shouldn't assume that we know what a stereotype is because we don't, but we need to find out in ways that don't reinforce them.

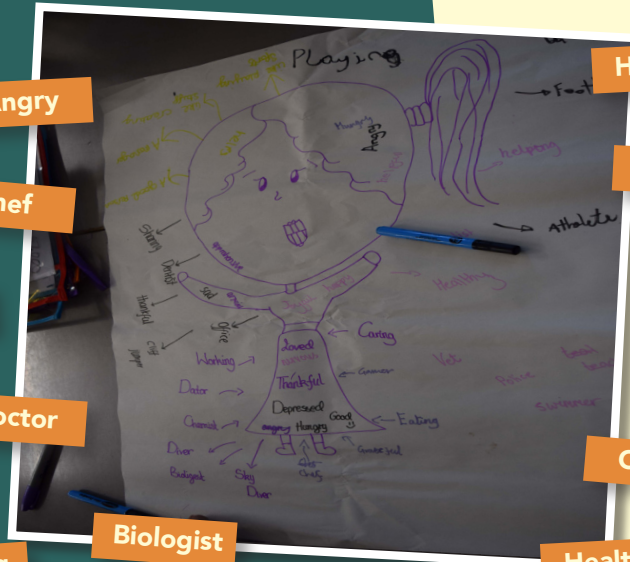


World leading academic
research evidence
Anne Fausto-Sterling

The Work of Gender for Children, by Rachel Thomson, Liam Berriman and Sara Bragg

[illegible]

Teacher



**She likes playing sport,
playing football in her job.**

She feels thankful, happy, she feels love.

STANDING UP TO STEREOTYPES

- We were given a number of statements to think about.
- We stood up if we thought they were true and stayed seated if not. Those of us who felt comfortable to do so explained the reasoning behind our thinking.
- This got us moving around and thinking on our feet.
- We listened to each other's views respectfully and took it in turns to explain our opinions.
- This was good preparation for the debate line (you can see how to adapt this for your school on the next page).
- We imagined a line through the class room, each end representing opposing strong opinions with all the degrees of certainty plotted in between

Again we reflected on how we felt about stereotypes and took a stand in the place that represented our views. We then took turns to raise our points in favour or against. We were encouraged to move along the line as our views changed.

Check out **P4C – philosophy for children** for ideas on how to run debates and encourage critical thinking skills



Open to debate

Debate has a long history and, in its broadest sense, relates to the exchange of ideas on a particular topic. If we say something is 'open to debate' this means that it is unproven and requires further discussion.

When we say that something is 'debatable' we are acknowledging the slippery and multi-faceted nature of the topic and that ideas are open to change over time and place. Globally, many parliaments, function by debating policies and ideas.

A debate is a formal discussion, usually with a speaker or arbiter to oversee the arguments for and against.

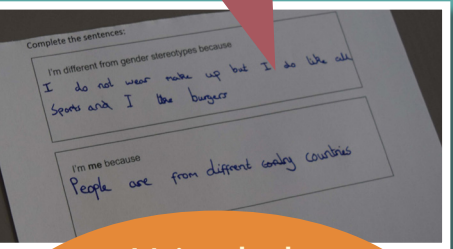
Read more about debating on **BBC bitesize**

In a task where we reflected upon how we all conform to and are different from gender stereotypes, these statements came up:

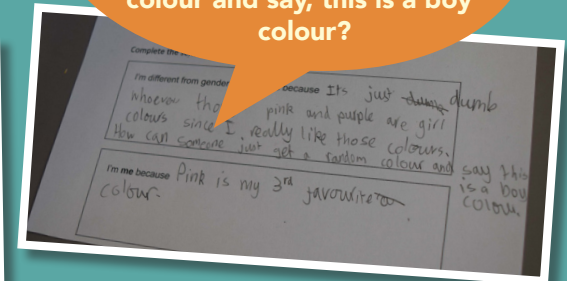
I'm a boy and I cry

People say all girls like pink but I don't

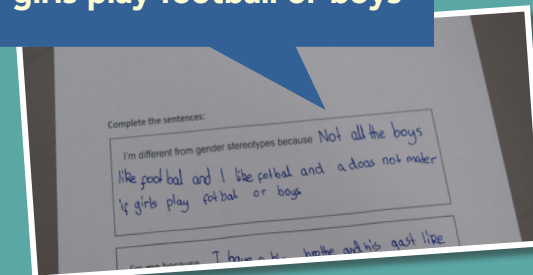
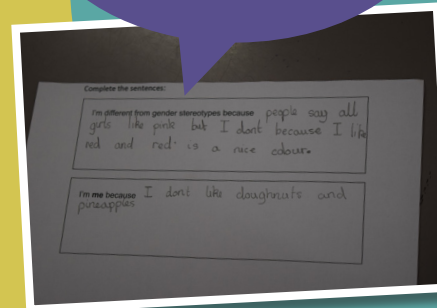
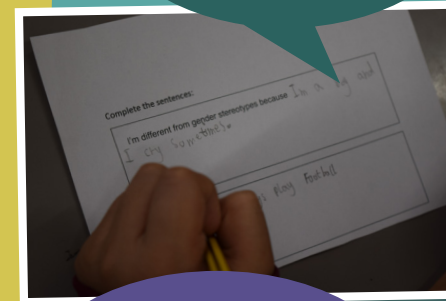
I do not wear makeup but I like all sports and I like burgers



It's just dumb whoever thought pink and purple are girl colours since I really like those colours. How can someone just get a random colour and say, this is a boy colour?



Not all the boys like football and I like football and it does not matter if girls play football or boys



DIY THE DEBATE LINE

A whole-class activity for exploring the changing nature of gender stereotypes through history and around the world

PREPARATION

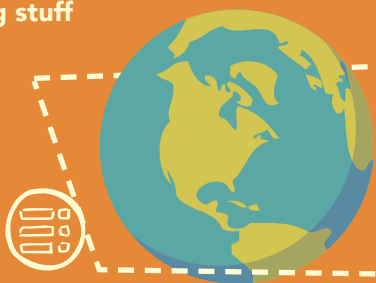
Before you get started read the **safety and support section**. It is essential to plan a debate that does not reinforce existing stereotypes

See the section '**Understanding Gender**' in **UNESCO's 2018 Guidance for Comprehensive Sexuality Education** for developmentally appropriate learning objectives and the relationship between gender norms, gender inequalities and gender-based and sexual violence.

Gather resources from trusted sources such as these (there are more listed at the end):

Let toys be toys

Stereotypes stop you doing stuff



1 Pick a stereotype you didn't know about before, for example: 'All children wear dresses'. (There are some surprising ones summarised **here**).

2 With the class, research this and other stereotypes from around the world and through history.

3 Create two imaginary lines intersecting your classroom or space. One is a line of history and it intersects with another line of global locations. Stick post-it notes around to identify eras and locations.

4 Share your surprising stereotypes and then ask pupils to position themselves on the lines in time and space.

5 Open up a debate by taking the stereotype around the world and through history. Are stereotypes useful? If they're not fixed what does this tell us?

Use visual aids and interesting facts to prompt the discussions, like **this article on breeching boys**.

To work more with gender stereotypes **read and watch the Welsh Government #thisisme campaign** which is all about recognising how gender norms and gender inequalities can have an impact on our lives.

Try out **GENDER WATCH BINGO!** A participatory creative audit of a whole school approach to gender equality.

DO ensure you use positive language when introducing stereotypes. Instead of saying 'people don't', or 'school children can't', make the statement affirmative, such as 'everyone can'. Introducing topics this way ensures that no one feels singled out if they are already awesome enough to be busting that stereotype!

What you'll need

Resources or IT with access to search engines
String (if an imaginary line feels a bit difficult)
Post-it notes to mark global locations and time frames on the strings



EXTENSION

Find a stereotype you didn't know before and learn all about it, how long it has existed and if it exists across the world.

Use this as your inspiration and fill a time capsule with the stereotypes that you think will disappear in the future and the reasons why.

Take your time capsule on a journey and share it with a class in a different year group.

Help them to join the debate and create and share their own time capsules!

ACTIVITY



Learn more about the importance of challenging gender stereotypes from **Save the Children** and **Educate a Child**

Learn about the importance of an **intersectional** approach to addressing gender stereotypes **here**

Ten ways to challenge stereotypes in the classroom

Let toys be toys is a campaign aimed at gender stereotyping by toy manufacturers, the stores that sell toys and marketing campaigns

The National Education Union has fantastic resources, see **Breaking the Mould**, and Gender Stereotypes Stop You Doing Stuff.

Parliament resources for running debates can be found **here**.

More debating resources

A Guardian article about the benefits of promoting debate in the classroom

Philosophy for Kids P4C have lots ideas on how to run debates and encourage critical thinking skills

The Welsh Government campaign **This is Me** aims to target harmful stereotypes and empower young people

The unstereotype alliance aims to challenge corporate and media stereotypes

Try out AGENDAs DIY resources: **Smashing Commercial Sexism; Making Rainbow Ribbons 4 Gender Equality; Gender Snap Pairs; Toys R For All of Us.**