

## Exercise 1: Life in a Box: Men Should ... Women Should ...



**Ideal For**

- Co-operative learning
- Community building
- Investigative
- Interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence building

### Notes for educators

This exercise hinges on the distinction between biological sex (the immutable and timeless differences between all males and all females) and socially created gender (our definitions of manhood and womanhood, our ideas of masculinity and femininity, typical physical attributes that we accentuate, and the relationships of power between the sexes.) Gender definitions change from era to era, culture to culture, and within different social classes and ethnic groupings. Because it proscribes certain behaviours, gender has traditionally set limits and restricts the full humanity of both women and men.

One resource that explores these in relation to men is available without cost online: Michael Kaufman's *Cracking the Armour: Power, Pain, and the Lives of Men*, ch. 1-3, [www.michaelkaufman.com/articles/crackingarmour.html](http://www.michaelkaufman.com/articles/crackingarmour.html)

This exercise draws on "Act-Like-A-Man Box," developed by Paul Kivel and the Oakland Men's Project, and adapted by Michael Kaufman.

- Please visit [www.whiteribbon.ca](http://www.whiteribbon.ca), Educators section, for performance-based assessment task ideas and how teachers across Canada are applying this lesson.
- Invite students to visit [www.whiteribbon.ca](http://www.whiteribbon.ca), Youth section, so they can post their comments and see what students across Canada have to say about gender stereotyping and violence against women. We have provided a bookmark (BLM-B) for your students.

### Materials

Activity sheet (BLM 1) — one copy for every two students  
 BLM-A Ticket Out the Door  
 BLM-B White Ribbon Campaign bookmark

### Lesson time

60 minutes

### General learning objectives

(For specific provincial curriculum linkages, visit [www.whiteribbon.ca](http://www.whiteribbon.ca), click on the Educators tab and then go to Provincial Curriculum Expectations)

- To enable students to talk about gender stereotypes and gender expectations.
- To see how gender stereotypes limit the choices of women and men.

### Introduction (5 minutes)

1. Recall ground rules for all classroom discussions. Remind students that you are counting on them to enable each student to respond as an individual who is owed respect and not measured against a stereotype.
2. Let students know that this activity allows us to examine our gender assumptions about both women and men.

(Optional) Use any of the following as a catalyst for thinking about the topic of gender stereotyping:

- i. a powerful read-aloud poem or song lyrics
- ii. song lyrics
- iii. images of men and women (video, still or creative media) of men and women in stereotypically different roles defined by society's expectations
- iv. Write the following on the board: "Every society has its definitions of what it means to be a man or a woman."

**Activity: Think, pair, share (10 minutes)**

1. Ask students what the term “peer pressure” means to them. Drawing on the students’ definitions, ask them to identify how peer pressure might be positive and how it might be negative. Divide the class into same-sex pairs and distribute the activity sheet. Tell the students they have four minutes to fill out the worksheet and no one is going to check their answers.
2. Ask them to come up with five types of behaviour or qualities that traditionally have been defined as appropriate or inappropriate for men and women. These points should not necessarily be their own opinions, but the traditional views of society.

**Whole-class discussion (30 minutes)**

1. Cycling through the groups (getting one point from each group), ask for the points they came up with about women. Repeat, asking about men. Write on the board or flipchart. If on a flip chart, write small enough that the full list will take up no more than one page. Ask what the class sees when they compare the lists. (They tend to define opposite qualities. Often the men’s list is seen as more positive.) What are the differences? How would the class summarize each list (for example, men have traditionally been seen as the stronger sex).
2. Ask which of these definitions are biologically natural and, by definition, describe all males or females. (You’ll find that few or none are biological. Here you can introduce the distinction between biological sex and socially constructed gender.) If they aren’t natural, where do we get these ideas?
3. Draw a box around each list. Explain that each set of lists is like a box that men and women traditionally were supposed to live within.
4. Ask the students how many girls and women they know who still live in their box — that is, fit each and every point. Discuss what has led to these changes. How have women benefited by escaping their box? (It is, of course, the modern women’s movement that provided the impetus for many women to escape their traditional box.) What put-downs are young women called when they don’t fit into the box?
5. Ask how many boys and men they know who live up to each and every expectation of their box. (Of course, few, if any, actually do.) What happens to the boy in school who tries to escape from the box? (He is bullied or teased.) Conversely, what happens to the boy who seems to fit in? (In other words, there is a system of rewards and punishments that keep boys and men in their box.) What put-downs are young men called when they don’t fit into the box?
6. What are the factors that force us into these gender roles? Where do we learn these roles? Do we see these attitudes in our parents? What people teach us these stereotypes?

**Conclusion (10 minutes)**

1. Ask the class how we all can benefit if we escape these boxes. What are the effects of being forced into these boxes? How might someone feel who doesn’t conform? What choices can we make in our lives to help not only ourselves, but also others, to escape these boxes?
2. Invite students to visit [www.whiteribbon.ca](http://www.whiteribbon.ca), Youth section, so they can post their comments and see what students across Canada have to say about gender stereotyping and violence against women.

**Lesson Assessment (5 minutes)**

Ask students to complete a Ticket Out the Door (BLM-A).  
Give students a bookmark (BLM-B) so they can visit [www.whiteribbon.ca](http://www.whiteribbon.ca) to voice their opinions and see what other youth are saying.

