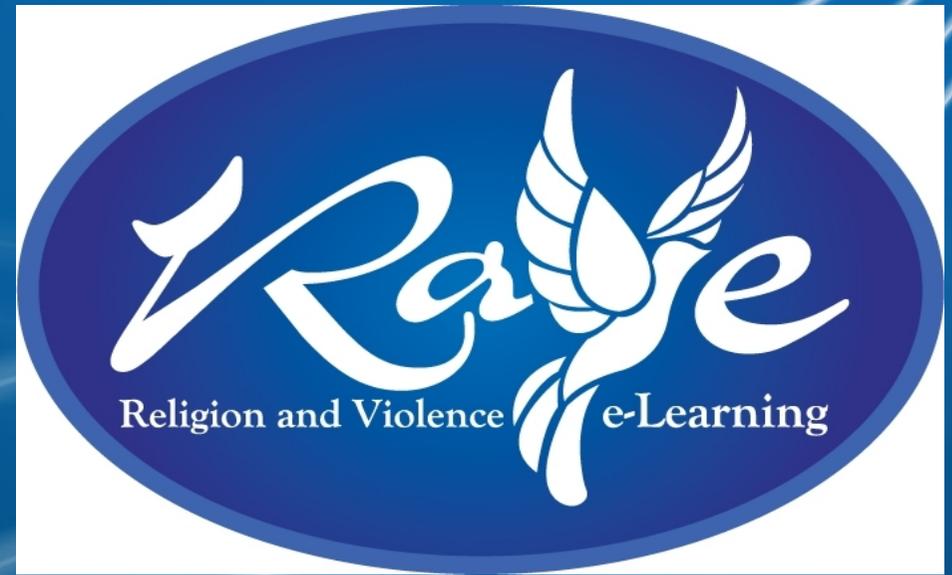


# Gender Relationships



# Learning objectives

In this lesson we will ask questions about our societal views about men and women.

- We will explore where we learn about gender roles.
- We will consider where our children learn about gender and where such ideas are reinforced.
- We will ask ourselves how gender stereotypes contribute to the problem of domestic violence.



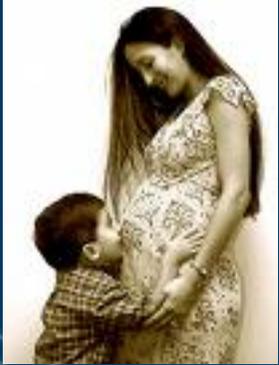
# Myths about women



To begin, let's explore some common myths about women:

- Woman as Mother Nature
- Woman as Terrifying Enchantress
- Woman as Saint
- Woman as Sex Object
- Woman as Insignificant Person

# Woman as Mother Nature



Why would women be compared to Mother Nature?

Where do such myths originate?

How does a woman's ability to bear children impact on her position in society?

This myth obscures that fact that being a woman is more than a biological fact. Do we think of men primarily in terms of biology?

What are the limitations of this myth about women?

# Woman as Terrifying Enchantress

Let's consider the biblical story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

What impact does the notion of "the fall" have on our views about women?

Are there alternative interpretations of this story that can free women from the prison of being understood as primarily responsible for sin?



What about fairy tales? How often are women depicted as evil or wicked step-mothers?

# Woman as Saint

In contrast to stories of evil women, the myth of woman as saint also operates on our consciousness.

How often are women praised for being saintly?

Are "good" women supposed to be subservient or obedient?

Do we believe that godly women should desire nothing and always put others ahead of themselves?

And, do we hold men to the same standards?



# Woman as Sex Object

In what ways are women viewed as sex objects?



How do we see women portrayed on television? Even elite female athletes are required to wear revealing clothing when they compete at televised events.

What about in magazines? Many ads reduce women to particular body parts.

What value do we place on female beauty? Think about how often news reports comment on a female politician's looks or clothes.

What does our obsession with looks teach our daughters? And what do we teach our sons to expect of women?

# Woman as Insignificant Person



Are women thought of as insignificant?

Why are men the central characters in so many more biblical stories than women? What does this say about the significance of women in sacred history?

What value do we place on women in our society?

Why do we still view some careers as more specifically for women and others for men?

Why do women with equal education and qualifications still earn less than men?

# Gender socialization

We all know that gender socialization is very significant. After all, we are all disheartened when we hear stories about sexual assault and teenage pregnancy. We want our daughters and sons to grow up and be confident and responsible. But gender socialization is not merely a private matter and we need to consider how we as a society prepare girls to be women and boys to be men.



# Boys and girls

How are boys and girls treated differently?

Researchers believe that children are treated differently from birth.



Boy babies are often characterized as strong. Girl babies, on the other hand, are often referred to as beautiful and delicate.



# Boys and girls at play

Boys and girls are encouraged to play with different kinds of toys.



- Parents buy dolls for their girls and trucks for their boys. Many encourage their daughters to play cooperatively, yet look for opportunities for their sons to engage in competitive play.
- In our society it seems natural for boys and girls to play differently. Have we thought about what impact such socialization may have on our children?

# Reinforcing gender roles

How do we reinforce gender-specific behaviour?

How do we decorate a child's room? Think about the children you know. What are the differences between the boys' rooms and the girls' rooms?

What kinds of clothes do we purchase for boys? What colours do they tend to wear? What about for girls?

What gifts do we purchase for children as birthday presents? Think about the cute train sets and the doll houses? Who is more likely to receive such gifts?

What do all these practices teach our children about their roles in society?

# Secondary socialization



What about socialization outside of the home?

Where are young people learning about what it means to be women and men in society?

Are they learning from their friends?

What are they learning from the media?

# Peer groups

Sociologists believe that as children develop friendships with other children, friends become more and more important.

In fact, by the time they become teenagers, many children will be more influenced by their peers than their own parents.



# Friendships



Researchers who study adolescent relationships find that many boys establish less intimate friendships than do many girls.

Often male friendships will center on activities, such as sports.

Girls, on the other hand, often form meaningful friendships with fewer people than do boys.

Instead, they develop close friendships with a few individuals.

# The media

The media has become a very powerful influence on young people in society.



What do we learn about gender from:

Magazines - how are women and men portrayed?

Romance novels - how are relationships characterized?

T.V. - what kind of people are selected for television shows? Do "reality shows" portray real people?

Movies - are they becoming more violent? What does this teach about problem solving?

# The media

Advertisements - who do we see in ads? How often do we see older people, those with disabilities or visible minorities?

Music - what do the lyrics of popular songs have to say about relationships? Do music videos have an influence on youth?

Internet - what kinds of websites are causing the most controversy?



What are the quality of relationships established through social-networking? What effects do video games have on children?

# Other groups

We all know that the family is very important in teaching children how to integrate into society. And certainly families teach their children how to act as girls and boys.

But other groups are important influences in teaching us about gender roles. Consider how the following groups might influence our understanding of what it means to be a man or a woman:

- schools
- churches
- places of employment
- government

# Final thoughts . . .

We know that children learn about gender role expectations from early on. And while such gender role socialization can help prepare children to live in mainstream society, let's consider other possible considerations.

From previous lessons, we have learned that many young girls will eventually be victimized by abuse. Knowing what we know about violence against women, what can we do to ensure that children are also taught that all forms of violence and abuse are wrong?

