

GENDER IDENTITY, STEREOTYPES & EXPRESSION TIP SHEET

What is gender identity? One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither. It is how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. It can be the same or different from what their doctor assigned them at birth.

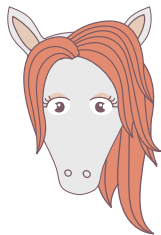
What is gender expression? The external appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

Recommendations for Creators:

1 Depict characters of all genders engaging in a variety of activities that are not stereotypically associated with their respective genders. For example, show girls excelling in math and science and boys in art or fashion. Show boys doing more chores.



2 Create more non-human characters as girls.



WHY? Males are often shown as the default.

RESEARCH: In a study looking at 476 children's television programs, 38% of total characters in children's media were women/girls. When they are human, it was pretty close to equal at 46%. The gender gap widens with non-human characters. Only 27% of animals were female and just 10% of robots/machines were female.

3 Show "tough" male characters being kind and vulnerable to other men and having close friendships.

4 Depict strong, appealing female characters who are not sexualized.



5 Depict male and female characters with diverse body shapes and sizes to ensure that all children feel represented and develop healthy ideas about their bodies.

6 Show characters who are not teased for having unique body shapes and sizes.



WHY? This can help young people better accept their bodies and achieve greater mental and physical health.

RESEARCH: In a study probing the reasons for which teen males experience dissatisfaction about their body image, it was found that wanting another man's body and being teased were some of the factors that result in greater body dissatisfaction for teen males.

GENDER IDENTITY, STEROTYPES & EXPRESSION TIP SHEET

7 Show a range of gender expressions and identities.

WHY? The number of youth who show fluid gender expression and identity is growing exponentially .

RESEARCH: In the US, 1 in 4 LGBTQ youth identifies as nonbinary. Globally, 1 in 4 Gen Z Youth identify as something other than heterosexual.



8 Create stories with characters who use alternate pronouns.

9 Show male characters who are nurturing and are proud and accepting of having a primary caregiving role and the responsibilities that come with it.

WHY? Being relevant to youth at this moment in history means acknowledging the shifting roles they are experiencing at home.

RESEARCH: More than 5.4 million children under age 18 were defined as being a caregiver for a family member. As many as 24% of middle school students and 16% of high school students provide care on a regular basis.



10 Create stories with characters who do not reinforce over exaggerated binaries with gender (i.e. tough, muscle bound, gun and truck loving boys or fancy, pink loving, boy crazy girls).

Reflection Questions?

✓ Are your characters reflective of the variety of ways humans interact? Do the characters only reflect cis-gender heterosexual people?

- Heteronormativity
- Heterosexual script

✓ Is each character's gender expressed in ways that reflect their complexity and humanity?

- Physical appearance
- Personality attributes
- Roles and Occupations

✓ What is the quantity and diversity of gender representation?

Research Sources:

Rodgers et al., 2017; Leone et al., 2011; Spinner et al., 2018; The Trevor Project, 2021; Ipsos, 2021; Ward & Grower, 2020; Liben & Bigler, 2007; Brown, 2021.

[For more insights & reflection questions check out these other tools from the Center for Scholars & Storytellers.](#)

