

Athletes As Leaders



Session 3: Challenging Harmful Stereotypes

Prep Before Session:

Make Sure You Have:

- Group agreements to refer to during “Warm Up” (if needed)
- Oppression chart: Create or print
- Ball to throw during “Cool Down”

Review Key Messages:

- Many people have learned harmful stereotypes about specific groups of people that we need to “unlearn.”
- We can help create a community that is safe and welcoming for all people, including all gender and racial identities.

Warm Up

Review Previous Session and Introduce Today’s Topic: (4 min)

Welcome! [Remind group about the agreements created in Session 1 if needed].

Last session we talked about privilege & oppression. Here is a chart with several examples of oppression, including who is given more power and who is given less power. This list is not meant to be a complete list of all forms of oppression or identities. It gives some examples but there are many more that exist.

In society, many of us have learned harmful messages and labels about specific groups of people. We can “unlearn” these messages. And help create a community that is safe and welcoming for everyone.

Facilitator Notes

You may choose to share that this is something that applies to you too, and that it’s ok to give yourself grace as you learn and “unlearn” together in these discussions.

[Ask for volunteers to share the meaning of the word "**stereotype.**" Possible answer: *an assumption or widely held belief about an entire group of people.*]

For example, there are many stereotypes based on gender. In society, there are messages that sound something like:

"Girls are so 'blank.'"
"Boys are good at 'blank.'"
"Women should be 'blank.'"
"Men have to act 'blank.'" (and so on)

These stereotypes usually assign something negative or limited to a specific gender. Stereotypes can be used as an excuse to disadvantage women, girls and non-binary folks. Like not trusting a woman in leadership because women are labeled as "too emotional." Stereotypes can also be used as an excuse for bullying and harassment. Like if a boy does not act tough, he is labeled "less of a man."

Please keep in mind not everyone identifies as strictly a woman or a man. Gender stereotypes also reinforce that there are only two categories of gender (boys/men & girls/women). They exclude non-binary and other gender identities. We can be more inclusive of people of all gender identities when we challenge stereotypes.

There are also endless stereotypes about race. In society, there are messages that sound something like:

"Black people act like 'blank.'"
"Asian people should be more 'blank.'"
"The Native American community is 'blank.'"
"Latinx people should be 'blank.'" (and so on)

These stereotypes usually assign something negative or limited to a specific racial group. Like assuming Black people are suspicious or that all Asian-Americans are foreigners. These stereotypes are used to justify racism, violence and harassment.

Biracial and multi-racial people are also flooded with all these different messages. They are often told that they are not enough for one community and not enough for another community. By challenging racial stereotypes, we can create a community that is more inclusive for people of all racial identities.

Most of us have heard these types of messages. They come from media, families, and historical roles and expectations. When we think about what we have been taught, we can understand the harm they cause. We can be direct about disagreeing with stereotypes. This can help change these messages in society.

Work Out

Discussion Questions: (6 min) [You can break into small groups for the “work out” discussion if you have a large group.]

❓ **What are some different expectations people have for boys in your sport vs. girls in your sport?**

[Prompts include: Why is this concerning? What message does this send?]

❓ **What racial stereotypes have you heard that you are concerned about?**

[Prompts include: Why is this problematic? What message does this send to people in the community?]

Talking Points: (2 min) [You may choose to share all talking points, or only those that have not been discussed already by the athletes.]

- » A person’s race and gender does not limit who they can be or what they can be good at.
- » Some common phrases in sports that we may not often think of are based on gender stereotypes. For example, knee push-ups are often called ‘girl push-ups,’ which implies that girls are weaker. We need to think about how those kinds of phrases can be harmful.
- » Some sports teams and schools have racial groups as mascots. The images often are based on racial stereotypes. We need to understand how hurtful it can be to have someone’s culture or identity reduced to a caricature or a costume.
- » Even stereotypes that may seem positive can be harmful. Like saying that a certain racial group is good at a certain job. Or saying that men are strong and tough. It can make people feel like they don’t belong if they don’t fit the stereotype.
- » People your age have challenged many of the expectations about gender and racial stereotypes, far more than any generation before them. Athletes can play a big role in this area. All athletes can be positive role models and break away from labels and stereotypes.
- » **So here is a challenge for you...** try to catch yourself making an assumption or judgment about someone. Ask yourself “would I think that if they were a different gender, or a different race?” Then try to replace it with a non-judgmental thought. We’ve all been taught these stereotypes and we need to “unlearn” them.

- » **As student leaders and athletes...** you can challenge the idea that people have to be a certain way based on their gender or race. You can help create a community that is safe and welcoming for all people.

Cool Down

Team Talk: (8 min) [You may choose to have specific athletes/leaders to facilitate the Team Talk.]

Now it is time for the Team Talk! Let's get in a circle and get ready to pass the ball. We are going to think of things that you can all do as student leaders & athletes. Hopefully these will be things everyone in the group can agree to do, when you are interacting with people on your team, at school, on social media, or in the community. We are hoping they will become the new team norms that will help you take action as leaders in the community.

Facilitator Notes

You may choose to build on the Team Talk, especially if you have a little extra time, and the proper resources and permissions. Ideas include: Make a poster & post it in the locker room, videotape the athletes saying statements from the Team Talk, or take pictures of them holding up signs with positive statements or action items from the Team Talk. These could be posted on the team's group messages or social media page (if you have consent from everyone and approval from the school).

This week we are going to brainstorm ways that we can challenge harmful stereotypes.

- ① How can you challenge the negative messages and limited roles for girls? Like if someone told a young girl she can't be a superhero, a football player, a doctor, or the president?
- ② What could you say to a person who is making a negative or hurtful comment about a specific racial group?
- ③ What are some ways that you can try to "unlearn" harmful stereotypes?

Thank you for all of your participation and sharing. This team has so many great ideas to make the community more safe, welcoming, and inclusive for everyone. It's time to break for the day (or get to practice).

Close the Circle with a Team Cheer.