# Driver 3: Stereotyped constructions of masculinity, femininity, and disability, and the intersecting impacts of this for women with disabilities

This driver refers to the ideas and beliefs held up by society about what it means to be male and female, and to have a disability or not.

## Some examples of gender and disability stereotypes, assumptions and expectations include:

* Men as dominant and aggressive,
* Women as passive and emotional,
* People with disabilities as burdensome or incapable, and
* People without disabilities as competent and ‘normal’

**Stereotypes can be harmful and limiting, and people who don’t fit into the stereotypes can face criticism or punishment.**

## These gender and disability stereotypes are also a key driver of violence against women with disabilities because they:

* Define able-bodied people and men as being ‘naturally’ dominant and therefore ‘naturally’ superior
* Define people with disabilities and women as being ‘naturally’ passive and submissive, which casts them as target for exploitation and abuse
* Define and reinforce masculinity as callous and insensitive, or suggest that men are ‘naturally’ more violent than women or are driven by uncontrollable sexual urges
* May glorify male violence, especially sexual aggression towards women
* Can lead to the assumption that people with disabilities don’t have sex or intimate relationships, leading to the incorrect assumption that people with disabilities do not need access to respectful relationships education or sex education
* Can suggest women and people with disabilities are inherently dishonest, unfaithful or need to be controlled
* Contribute to sexist and ableist hierarchies where men have power over women and able-bodied people have power over people with disabilities

**Sources:**

This content has been adapted from Change the Story: A Shared Framework for the Primary Prevention of Violence against Women and their Children in Australia. Our Watch (2015).

# Action 3:  Foster positive personal identities and challenge gender and disability stereotypes and roles.

## Promote positive & normalised representations of women with disabilities

* Disability is not a tragedy or a deficit, and it is not uncommon – approximately 18% of the Australian population has a disability.
* Like most people, women with disabilities have relationships, jobs, friends, and university degrees.  Increasing representations of women with disabilities doing standard, usual, typical, expected things means that society is less surprised (and less resistant) when women with disabilities go about their lives or seek access to spaces.
* Recognise and promote women with disabilities’ skills, talents and contributions, and don’t be surprised when they exceed your expectations!

## Promote and celebrate diversity & difference amongst women with disabilities.

* Stereotypes rely on portraying people as being all the same, but women with disabilities are a diverse bunch.  We have different disabilities, opinions, cultures, and beliefs.
* When we celebrate, promote and represent these differences, people are less likely to make stereotypes, and this opens up more opportunities.

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## Challenge yourself and others to reject rigid gender roles and stereotypes of masculinity and femininity

* Challenge aggressive, entitled and dominant constructions of men and masculinity, and challenge submissive or sexualised constructions of women and femininity.
* Promote and support gender-equitable relationships at home, in the workplace and in society

## Promote the social model of disability

* The social model is a way of understanding disability that was developed*by* people with disabilities. The social model recognises that disability inequality does not result from impairment alone but is created by a social environment that excludes people with disabilities from full participation in society due to attitudes and environmental barriers.
* Instead of focusing on what is ‘wrong’ with a person, the social model focuses on what is wrong with the society we live in and what needs to change to achieve equitable opportunities and participation for people with disabilities.

## Promote disability pride.

Women with disabilities drive our own culture – one where we are proudly visible, where we know our own worth, and where we live in plain view.  Disability equality is about more than just inclusion; it is about honouring and celebrating our culture and our contributions.

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