

CHAPTER 2: GENDER AND SEXUAL RIGHTS

It is important to teach about gender early in your course because it deeply influences all aspects of sexuality. For the purposes of this manual, gender is defined as the cultural characteristics, behaviors, and roles that are considered to be male or female, not the obvious biological differences. Gender varies by culture, but it begins influencing social development from birth; we already have a strong sense of it by age three. Gender affects every aspect of life from how we see and value ourselves to how we learn to communicate and interact with one another. Gender especially affects how we express and experience our sexuality, how we initiate romantic relationships, and how we feel about giving and receiving pleasure.

Gender also requires a discussion of rights. Inequality between the sexes often limits girls' and women's access to information and health services, depriving them of their right to control their bodies and decide on matters related to sexuality and fertility. Gender discrimination can also generate and perpetuate sexual violence, forced marriage, and harmful practices like female genital cutting. Sexuality education can and must do its part to correct these injustices. A gender perspective should be included in all topics.

Teaching Tips

- Create a positive, non-blaming, understanding atmosphere when teaching about gender. Individuals learn the values, norms, and behaviors of gender very early from those around them and are not to blame for having absorbed biases. However, individuals can learn not to discriminate and should be held accountable for working to change injustices.
- Make it clear that gender-based insults, jokes, or discriminatory remarks will not be allowed in your classroom, and refer back to the course values when necessary.
- To teach gender issues effectively, the teacher must be able to clearly identify gender-based injustices within the culture and be convinced of and committed to the need to change them.
- If participants have difficulty understanding gender inequality and injustice, begin by talking about another issue, such as race, ethnicity, class, or age. Use those ideas to help participants understand gender discrimination, as the underlying issues are fundamentally the same. For young people, age-based discrimination is an issue that will likely be easily understood.
- Be prepared to address sexual orientation and homophobia, which may arise when discussing gender. Anyone who is judged not to conform sufficiently to prescribed gender roles may be perceived as gay and be taunted or shunned as such, regardless of his or her actual sexual orientation. It is important for participants to understand that discrimination and disrespect are never acceptable.

Content Considerations

- When teaching about gender, it is essential to discuss power, oppression, and internalized oppression, whereby victims of oppression or discrimination come to believe in the stereotypical or derogatory characteristics ascribed to them.
- Emphasize that because gender-role stereotypes are learned, they can be challenged, unlearned, and changed.
- While hurting everyone, gender-role stereotyping and discrimination systematically deprive girls and women of power. It is essential to discuss the devastating consequences of such discrimination. It is also important that boys and men understand the benefits to them of changing gender-role stereotypes.



- Acknowledge that it can be difficult to change gender roles and that it requires courage and persistence. People who do not conform to gender roles may be teased, bullied, harassed, or attacked. This should never be condoned.
- Emphasize that working to end gender discrimination and stereotyping is easier if people support each other and work together.

SELECTED LESSON PLAN 2.1: ACT LIKE A MAN, ACT LIKE A WOMAN

SOURCE

“Father-Son roleplay,” “The Act-Like-A-Man Box,” “Party roleplay,” “One Thing,” and “Act-Like-A-Lady Flower,” *Helping Teens Stop Violence: A Practical Guide for Counselors, Educators, and Parents*, by Allan Creighton, Battered Women’s Alternatives, and Oakland Men’s Project. ©1992. To order, please fax 510-865-4295, visit the website at www.hunterhouse.com, or write to Hunter House Publishers, P.O. Box 2914, Alameda, CA 94501, USA. Reprinted with permission.

Suitable for ages 12 to 18

Summary

These activities pave the way for a critical understanding of gender roles by first showing what they are, then showing how they may be harmful to both women and men. The session uses scripted role plays between a father and son and a young woman and her boyfriend to illuminate the ways in which gender roles affect people. After the role plays, participants brainstorm characteristics that are normally associated with feminine or masculine traits and discuss the consequences of deviating from those behaviors. The discussion cleverly guides adolescents to identify gender roles, how they are learned, the ways they restrict and harm people, and how emotional and physical violence is often used to maintain them. The session also shows how boys’ socialization may link to violence directed at women as well as at those who don’t adhere to prescribed gender roles.

Teaching Notes

- Read over the activities and develop them into a lesson plan by adding an introduction, linkages, and some concluding questions, as needed.
- Note that some of the items listed under “physical” in the Act-Like-A-Man Box and Act-Like-A-Lady Flower exercises are more emotional than physical. Adjust the questions and headings to reflect this.

Adapting the Lesson

- Adapt the role plays so that they reflect situations that would occur where you live, making sure that they show how emotional and physical violence may be used to teach and perpetuate gender roles.
- Please note that this lesson plan is excerpted directly from a larger sexuality education guide, and therefore contains minor references to materials not included in this manual.

▲ 1. Father-Son roleplay

Presenter (P) plays the father (F), and a male student from the class is chosen to play the son (S). The son is sitting down watching TV (let the student pick the show) and the father enters the room waving a report card. (Prepare the student by explaining the scenario; get agreement on physical contact.)

F: Turn off the TV! What the hell are you doing? And what the hell is this? (Shows report card.)

S: It's my report card.

F: Your report card! If you're so smart, why were you stupid enough to get a D in Math?

S: I did the best I could.

F: D is the best you could do? You're just stupid!

S: That's not fair. (Tries to get up.)

F: (Shoves him down.) Don't you talk back to me! You hear, boy?

S: (Starts to cry.)

F: Oh, you gonna cry now? Huh? (Shakes son, hits him with report card.) You can't even act like a man! (Stomps out. Son stops in place to end the roleplay.)

P asks the son: How are you feeling right now about yourself? About your father? About what just happened?

P asks the class: What's going on here? Why is this fight happening? Who is responsible? Is this really about grades?

P: One thing the father told his son is to "act like a man." Let's talk about that.

▲ 2. The “Act-Like-A-Man” Box

P talks to teen men in the room, who pretend for a moment that they are 10 years old and that there is an adult man—father, stepfather, coach, etc.—who is angrily saying to them, “Act like a man.” **P** says this in an angry, yelling tone to each of them, and then steps back from that role.

P: What are you guys learning when someone says that to you?

Co-presenter writes a list on the board of the characteristics the students name. Be sure to include “tough” and its equivalents, and “don’t cry.” Draw a box around the entire list and label it “Act-Like-A-Man” (see page 88).

(A note on “macho”: Invariably someone will mention “macho” as a male characteristic. Always suggest an English term instead, and take a minute to explain that “macho” is a Spanish/Mexican term, having to do with honor, taking care of one’s family, etc., that has been misused negatively in English as “tough, insensitive,” and then reapplied to Mexican men as a stereotype. To avoid this form of racism, it is best not to use the term at all.)

P: We call this our “Act-Like-A-Man” box. We believe that all boys learn about this box as they grow up. Who are some of the people in society that teach us to be this way?

(Co-P lists: parents, friends, lovers, media, coaches, teachers, grandparents.)

P: What names do boys get called when they try to step outside of this box?

(Co-P writes the names along the right side of the box.)

P: What is the purpose of these names? What are you supposed to do when someone calls you these names?

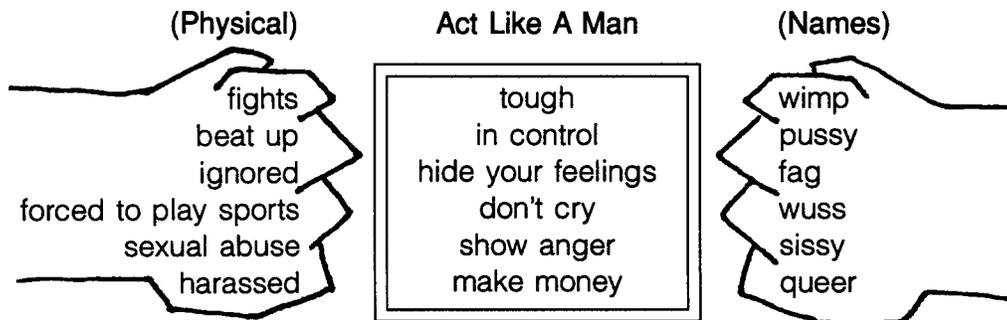
P: What is the particular purpose of *these* names? (Point out the names “fag,” “queer,” and any others that refer to gays.) When boys hear them, what are they being taught about being close to other boys or men? What are they being told about gay men? How does this fear of being labeled keep men in the box?

(Note: be prepared to address misinformation about gay people and the anxiety that will bubble right up when you even refer to this subject.)

P: These names are little slaps in the face, telling us to get back

in the box. They are emotionally violent, they hurt us, and they make us want to change our behavior so we never get called these names again.

P: What happens to boys physically? How do they get treated physically to make sure they act like men? (Co-P writes down list on other side of box, and then draws a fist around either side of the box.)



P: Something else that happens to boys besides getting beat up is that one out of six boys is sexually abused before the age of 18. These boys are usually abused by a man, not gay, who may seem to be “like everyone else”—he may have a wife, children, etc. What is it about this box is that going to make it real hard for a guy who’s been sexually abused to talk about it and get help? What names will he be called if he talks?

We’re going into this because part of the message for men is: when you get hurt, take it in, keep it in, don’t ever tell anyone. Now, when you raise someone from the time he is a baby to take the pain, keep it to himself, and not to show any feelings except anger, you’re training someone to walk around like a time bomb. What is going to happen when this person is 17 or 18 or 20 and finds himself getting mad or upset about something?

We can see from the box that boys are not born to be violent, but that they get emotionally and physically hurt to make them stay in control. No boy wants it to be this way, and all of us as guys try to figure out how to get out of this box.

Let’s talk now about being raised female. We’ll start off this section with a roleplay, too.

▲ 3. Party roleplay

P picks a male and female volunteer from the class. **Scenario:** the male (**M**) and female (**F**) are boyfriend and girlfriend. They have been in a relationship for the past eight months. They have sex on a regular

basis and use birth control consistently and responsibly. F's best friend's parents are gone for the weekend, and so the best friend is having a party. There is beer and wine coolers and people are listening to music and dancing. M and F end up in the parents' master bedroom. They are not drunk or high.

The Male Role: M wants to have sex with F. He knows they do it almost every Saturday night and he wants to tonight. He loves her, but will not take "No" for an answer. Plus, his friends saw him go upstairs, and he feels he will need to tell them a good story when he goes back downstairs. Give the roleplayer permission to use every line in the book.

The Female Role: F loves M a lot. He is very popular, very good-looking, and a lot of other girls would love to go out with him. But, tonight she doesn't want to have sex with M—just because she doesn't feel like it. Plus, she feels like all of their friends are watching them and she feels self-conscious. However, she's scared of losing M, so she doesn't want to make him mad.

The Script: It might be easiest to begin the roleplay with M putting his arm around F and saying, "I really want to have sex with you tonight." A last line for the roleplay can be M saying, "Goddamit, I'm gonna get what I want from you *now!*" Let the roleplayers fill in in-between, with the focus being on M pressuring F physically and emotionally and F politely trying to get him to see her viewpoint. They freeze in place to end the roleplay.

P asks the boyfriend, in character: How are you feeling about what you're doing? How do you feel right now about yourself?

P asks the girlfriend, in character: How are you feeling about what your boyfriend is doing to you? What keeps you from saying these things to your boyfriend? What are you afraid of?

P then "freezes" the boyfriend, asking him to listen without reacting negatively, and has the girlfriend tell him how she feels and what she wants/needs from him.

P asks for class feedback: What do you see happening here? Is the boyfriend "acting-like-a-man?" Why is he doing what he's doing? How does she feel? Is it hard for her to say "No?" Why? What kind of violence is happening here?

P thanks the volunteers and asks the class to give them a round of applause.

P: Now, we'll finish talking about women tomorrow, so I want you to remember this roleplay we've just done. Look around at

school—notice the way that men and women act around you. Do you meet guys who fit in the box? Guys who are out of the box? Think about some experiences you have had as a woman. Are any similar to our roleplay?

P may choose to tell a personal experience about dating violence, if it seems appropriate.

▲ 1. One Thing

P: (to the women in the class) What is one thing that men or boys say to you—something that hurts you or that you don't like—that you never want to hear again. You can think back to the roleplay and some lines the boyfriend used on the girlfriend. (Co-P writes the comments off to one side of the board.)

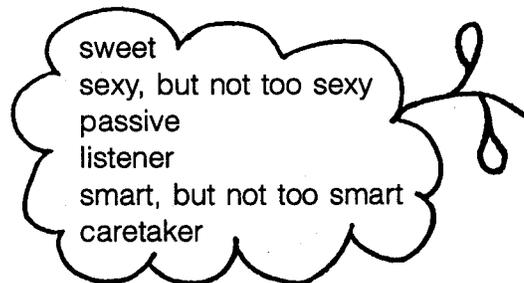
One Thing

trust me
if you loved me you would
I'll call you
you'll do what I tell you
you're my woman
no fat chicks allowed

▲ 2. Act-Like-A-Lady Flower

P: (still to the women in the class) What is this list of things men say to you telling you about how you are supposed to act as a woman? What in your upbringing have you learned about how you are supposed to act if you are a "good girl"? How does society tell you to act if you are going to act like a "lady"? (Co-P writes down responses about "how women are supposed to act." Expect responses such as "sexy but not too sexy," "smart but not too smart," "listener," and "caretaker.") Draw a flower around this list and label it "Act Like A Lady."

Act Like A Lady



P: We call this the “Act-Like-A-Lady” Flower. Just like in the Act-Like-A-Man Box, women who are out of this flower get called names to make them stay in the flower, to make them act the way society says “nice women” should act. What are some names women get called if they step out of the flower? (Co-P lists on board to the right side. You will get names like whore, slut, ho, tramp, bitch, frigid, virgin, lesbo, dyke, butch.)

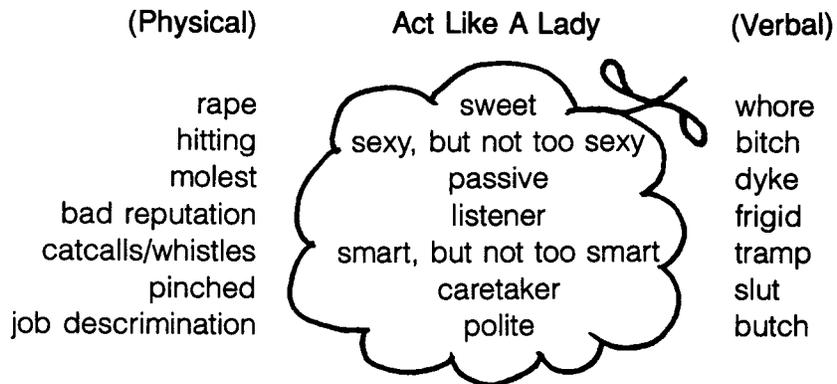
P: So, women get called different names for being out of the flower in different ways. Maybe if you as a woman are “too smart,” according to the flower, you’ll be called a bitch. Maybe if a woman is “overly provocative,” according to society, then she is called one of the “whore” words. Maybe if a woman is “too athletic” for the flower, she’ll be called a dyke.

You might have noticed that a lot of the names guys get called have to do with being tough—they are about what guys *do*. What do you notice about a lot of these names? Most of them are about women being—or not being—sexual. Women are identified by how they *look*.

P: How about these particular names? (Point out “dyke,” “lesbo,” and other terms referring to lesbians.) What happens to women who want close relationships of any kind with other women? What message do you get about lesbians from these names? What’s the purpose of these names?

(Note: Again, be prepared to deal with misinformation—and panic—about this subject in the classroom.)

P: What are some of the physical things that get done to women who step out of the flower? (Co-P lists these to the left. You will get answers such as: rape, hitting, job discrimination, a bad reputation, date rape, molesting, catcalls, pinches, etc.) So, now our flower looks like this:



P: We feel that it is really important to point out something about the act of rape: a woman can be raped regardless of whether she is in the flower or not, just by virtue of being a woman. A woman can be perfectly in the flower and be raped, and a woman can be totally out of the flower and be raped. It is really scary to look at this. The statistic is that one out of three or four girls is sexually abused by the time she is 18, usually by an adult man. And one out of three teen women in a dating relationship in high school gets physically or sexually abused.

P: Now that we've looked at both the flower and the box, what is it about them that leads to violence in teen relationships? (Get open discussion going with class around this question.)

SELECTED LESSON PLAN 2.2: WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING GENDER

SOURCE

Jill Lewis, "Ways of Understanding Gender," *Gendering Prevention Practice: A practical guide to working with gender in sexual safety and HIV/AIDS awareness education*, The Living for Tomorrow Project at the Nordic Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Research (NIKK), 2003, Oslo. Reprinted with permission.

Suitable for ages 15 and up

Summary

This series of exercises encourages participants to critically examine existing gender roles and envision how expectations for men and women could change. In Lewis's exercise 2.1 participants write about their personal experiences of the gender system and then share with the rest of the class. In exercise 2.2 participants examine their assumptions about nonphysical differences between men and women; this encourages them to question the origin of such assumptions. Exercise 2.3 shifts the focus to social expectations. Participants discuss the current status of men and women in their society, focusing on areas of equality and inequality, and then list differences in expectations for men and women in a variety of social arenas. Participants discuss the consequences of these expectations. Finally, by describing and discussing how gender roles have changed over generations (grandparents, parents, and young people today) in exercise 2.4, participants recognize that gender systems are neither fixed nor inevitable.

Teaching Notes

- At the end of exercise 2.1, ask questions such as: "What feelings were associated with being male in the stories? Female?" "What similarities and differences did you notice in the experiences of females? Males?"
- After the groups have brainstormed in exercise 2.2, ask them to sort the differences into those they all agreed on and those that they didn't.
- To highlight the greater impact that gender expectations have on women and encourage participants to reconsider or challenge such expectations, ask additional questions during the final discussion of exercise 2.3, such as: "What do you notice about the consequences for women? What about for men?" "Which of these expectations do you agree with? Which do you disagree with?" "What can you do to challenge those you don't agree with?"
- To provide additional guidance to your participants in the first activity, you could go through the list of topics included in exercise 2.3.
- Wrap up with some summarizing questions, such as: "What are the main conclusions you can draw from the exercises that we did today?" (If necessary, give them a prompt: "... about the differences/similarities in male and female experiences?" "... about how different men and women actually are?" "... about how equal men and women are?" "... about whether gender roles have changed?") Conclude by asking them to complete the following sentences: "One area of gender inequality I am concerned about is . . ."
"One thing about gender roles I want to change is . . ."

Adapting the Lesson

- These exercises were originally designed for use with young adults, so exercise 2.4 includes categories of "you now" and "young people today." If you are working with adolescents, remove the category of "young people today" and make appropriate changes to the questions that follow the activity.



WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING GENDER

Each of us has learned and digested what it “means” to be a man or a woman – right from our early years. It is one thing to look around and see the external social signs of gender meanings. It is another, equally important, to reflect on how our personal imaginings of gender, that have left traces in us from experiences and memories of growing up, affect our assumptions about gender.

Warm up

Ask participants to stand in a circle. Go around the group twice with each person finishing these sentences:

I would like to be (*name a well-known WOMAN*) **because she...**

I would like to be (*name a well-known MAN*) **because he...**

EXERCISE 2.1 A TIME I REALLY KNEW I WAS A MAN OR A WOMAN

Aim: To anchor for participants a personal sense of experiencing the gender system
Materials: Pen and paper for everyone, and enough space for everyone to sit on their own
Time: 45 minutes total: about 15 minutes writing, 30 minutes reading and reflections

Explaining the activity

Give the following explanation to the group:

Usually we go about daily life doing lots of things without thinking “I am a man” or “I am a woman” as we go. But sometimes there are moments when our experience can be vividly shaped by the very fact that each of us is either a man or a woman. The situation would have been a totally different experience if we had been the other sex.

Think of a time when you were very aware that you were a boy / girl, or man / woman – when the situation made it very visible to you that being male or female determined what was happening to you. Take some time to think back in your life and find such an experience.

We will have 15 minutes while everyone simply writes down the story of what happened. Please do this quietly and then we will have the chance to discuss what emerges. Don’t try to explain or analyze, just tell the story (e.g. “I was 13 years old, walking home from my grandmother’s when...”).

Call everyone back into the circle after 15 minutes and ask for volunteers who would like to read their stories. After the first volunteers, go systematically around the circle, giving each person a chance to read out loud or pass. Go around twice, in case someone changes their mind and does want to read after all.

After everyone who wishes to has read their stories, ask the group to reflect on the themes or issues that emerged.

This exercise brings to light a range of different ways that personal experience is marked by the gender system – right across our lives. It often brings out very strong memories of the social pressures experienced by men or women to “perform” according to the traditionally expected gender norms or roles. It can bring out stories of shock or violence or fear or vulnerability – from men as well as women. It is important to thank everyone who reads.

EXERCISE 2.2 ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT DIFFERENCE

Aim: To make visible “popular” assumptions about male and female bodies and sex
Materials: Pen and paper for each group
Time: 30 minutes total: 10 minutes discussing in groups, 20 minutes feedback and discussion

Have everyone go into groups of 3 or 4, some single-sex and some mixed.

Ask each group to discuss and make a list of their thoughts in response to this question:

Apart from *physical* differences, what do you consider to be the main differences between men and women? (So this is NOT about the BODY – but other perceptions of difference)

After making their lists, small groups should report back to the main group, and this larger group should be asked to respond to each small group’s list.

Have an open discussion. The following questions may help to focus the debate:

Are these fixed truths about men and women? Do these ideas of difference relate to you and people you know? Were they the same 100 years ago? Are these differences learned or biologically fixed behaviors? How do you know what you claim is “natural” or true? Why do we claim there is so much difference between men and women?

The presence of probable differences of perception and interpretation in the group will highlight how informal assumptions and popular beliefs are often based on unconsciously accumulated hearsay and stereotypes rather than objective truths. Often we opt for very limiting traditions for interpreting the male and female body. To script safer sexual behaviors it is important to be open to imagining male and female bodies able to enact different behaviors.

EXERCISE 2.3 IMAGES OF EQUALITY

Aim: To make explicit in the group the different messages young people receive about gender
Materials: Pen and paper for each small group
Time: 45 minutes total: 10 minutes in small groups, 35 in feedback and discussion

First – ask the full group for some responses to these two questions:

**Are men and women equal in our country today?
What are the main areas of equality and inequality?**

Then divide people into 5 groups, each to discuss **one** of the following, for 10 minutes:

Are there different expectations for men and women in the following areas of social life?

- **Education and training**
- **Employment**
- **Family responsibilities**
- **Socially acceptable behavior**
- **Sexual behavior**

In full group again, quickly gather feedback from each group, and pose the questions to the full group after each topic:

What effect on women or men do you think these different expectations have?

Are they based on biology or social customs? Do they feel “right” to you?

What consequences do these expectations have on young people growing into men or women?

EXERCISE 2.4 IMAGES OF CHANGE

Aim: To provoke thinking about how the gender system changes across time

Materials: Flip chart and pen, or board and chalk

Time: 30 minutes

Ask for responses to the following and write them under headings on a flip chart.

In grandparents' time	In parents' time	You now	Young people today

Was life “as a woman” or “as a man” different for your grandparents from how it is for you? Can you give some examples? For women? For men?

Is life “as a woman” or “as a man” different for teenagers today, than it was for you or your parents as teenagers?

Have sexual customs and behaviors changed since your grandparents' time? And for young people now? Do you think sexual relations were different then? Why?

So are gender systems fixed or changing? What affects changes? Technology? Laws? Economics? Ideas of human rights? Globalization? Note that in most societies, gender systems have changed radically over the second half of the 20th century.