

# Gender Roles Activity

## Goals:

- To discuss gender roles and stereotypes.
- To illustrate how gender stereotypes can lead to unhealthy relationships and increase the risk of sexual assault.
- To broaden the concept of what gender and gender expression can be.

## Have Ready:

- Flipchart paper or a white board and markers.

## Instructions:

- Ask youth, **“Which genders are recognized the most in our society?”** “Male/Female.” We know that gender is who we know ourselves to be, and folks have a right to identify with whatever gender they are. **“What about roles?”** A role is something that you play. Just like characters in a show or movie, gender roles or scripts tell us how we are supposed to act as males and females. Gender roles are based primarily on stereotypes which are taught to us by media and society around us.
- Ask youth, **“What’s a stereotypical male supposed to be like in our society?”**
  - Tough/Strong
  - Not supposed to cry
  - Not express emotion except for anger
  - To want sex all the time
  - Take up a lot of space (physically and verbally)
  - Voice their opinion
  - Aggressive communicator
- **“If he does show emotions, what does he sometimes get called?”** Weak or effeminate. These words can be harmful, and are

often homophobic and sexist. When guys get called names for showing emotions, it can make people hide those feelings or feel ashamed for having normal feelings.

- **“What about the stereotypical female?”**
  - Weak
  - Over emotional
  - Caring and nurturing to others
  - Puts others wellbeing before their own
  - Not voice their opinions
  - Not supposed to want sex
  - Cries a lot
  - Expected to be passive communicators
- Ask youth, **“If she does act assertively what is she called?”**  
Bossy or a bitch.
- Again, these words can be harmful, and are often homophobic and sexist. We can see in this example that everyone loses out. These stereotypes hurt all of us because they make it harder for males and females to communicate respectfully and honestly within their relationships. Males have a harder time speaking about their fears and are taught to communicate aggressively to fit the male gender role. Women are told that their voices don’t matter and that they should put other people ahead of themselves.
- This dynamic often leads to unhealthy or even abusive relationships. When we are discussing sex, we can see how these gender roles can lead to a possible sexual assault.
- **“What could it be like if everyone was encouraged to communicate assertively in a relationship?”** (Would folks feel scared of their partner? Would they feel safe to say what they felt? Would they be listening to each other?)
  - Healthy, respectful communication.
  - Respectful conflict, where people feel heard and not threatened.
  - Both people feel good and respect relationship boundaries.

- Feel safe with one another and comfortable being vulnerable.
  - Both partners can share their emotions in a calm and respectful way.
  - No abuse.
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- Gender stereotypes do not help us meet our needs because they limit us to playing a role instead of being who we are. People are even punished by society for acting outside of a gender role. The stereotypes represent only two extremes of gender when in reality someone could be anywhere in between or not identify at all with the stereotypes.
  - When we challenge gender stereotypes, it gives us more power to say what we really want for ourselves. We can also figure out ways to communicate and negotiate our sexual boundaries and desires in a respectful way.