

Child & Adolescent Sexual Development: Gender Identity & Expression

Grades 11 and 12, Lesson #3

Time Needed

One class period

Student Learning Objectives

To be able to...

1. Define and distinguish between “gender expression” and “role extreme or stereotype”.
2. Recognize that a person’s gender identity and expression are probably to some extent biologically predisposed and to some extent socially influenced.
3. Give examples of dangerous or destructive consequences of carrying gender roles to extremes.
4. Describe ways in which sexual stereotyping hurts us all, men and women alike.

Agenda

1. Discuss the lesson’s relevance.
2. Use the Gender Role Transparency and discussion to define the concept of “gender expression” and to introduce the origins of gender identity and expression (a combination of biological and social factors).
3. In small, highly structured, co-ed groups, have students articulate the advantages and disadvantages of (or “what they like” and “what’s difficult about”) being whichever gender they are. Have them describe their perceptions of people of the other gender (from their own experience and/or as portrayed in the media).
4. Use a fishbowl exercise to help students identify and debunk myths and stereotypes about their own gender and examine how gender role extremes and stereotypes damage people of both genders.
5. Debrief the exercise, helping the class distinguish between gender expression, per se, and a role extreme or stereotype. Help them consider the costs of these latter phenomena.
6. Assign homework.

Materials Needed

One copy of ...

Gender Role Transparency *

One per student of...

Individual Homework Exercise on "Gender Roles"

At least eight sets per class of...

Family/Friend Homework Exercises A-D

Having available eight copies of each *Family/Friend Homework Exercise* will allow each student to choose at least one, if he or she prefers this to a written individual assignment.

* Alternately, beginning in late 2006, all FLASH transparencies will be available as PowerPoint files on the FLASH web site: www.metrokc.gov/health/famplan/flash

Activities

1. Discuss the lesson's relevance:

You are well aware that adolescence is a time of change. One of the tasks a teen must accomplish, one of the normal parts of adolescent development, is to figure out what it means to him or her to be a man or a woman. Each person has to find his or her own path ... after sorting through all the messages from family, friends, the media and his or her own heart. This lesson will give you a chance to examine your own feelings and beliefs about men's and women's roles and to hear a little about other people's journeys.

IMPORTANT: Invite students to talk about their own cultures' perspectives throughout this lesson.

2. Use the **Gender Role Transparency** to define the terms "gender expression" And "gender variance."

Elaborate on the definition of "gender variance" by explaining that there are degrees of gender variance. A person can be just a little gender variant (i.e., just a little gender non-conforming or out of synch with their family's and culture's and generation's expectations) ... for example, a woman who likes to play sports or a man who likes to cook. Others, however, are most comfortable in gender expressions that differ a lot from what is expected by those around them. They might be a very masculine girl or woman or a very feminine boy or man. They may come to think of themselves as "transgender" or, depending upon where they live and their generation, possibly "genderqueer," or they may not have a particular label for themselves.

People can't always "read" gender variant people. Some cultures are fine with that. In fact, in some indigenous (American Indian) cultures gender variant people are honored as healers. Each native language has its own term for these highly respected individuals, but they translate roughly into English as "two-spirit." In contrast, some cultures are less respectful of sexual diversity or even rigid. In many places in the U.S. today, people will blurt out rude questions ("Are you a girl or a boy?") or feel justified in physically assaulting gender variant people. According to www.rememberingourdead.org, over the last decade in the U.S., about one person per month has died due to transgender-based hate or prejudice. Some of the victims identified as transgender. Some may have cross-dressed or performed in drag professionally. Others were just too feminine or too masculine for their assailants' liking.

Ask the class where they think a person's most comfortable gender expression comes from (its origins).

Emphasize that, while experts may disagree about the relative influences of biology and learning on gender expression, clearly both are involved to some extent.

Studies do show that increased testosterone (a male hormone that is one of a family of chemicals called steroids) makes a person more aggressive. And there are clearly differences in brain and body structure between men and women that may account to some extent for how we behave. Other studies have followed intersex babies – babies whose

bodies don't fit typical definitions of male or female -- who were mistakenly raised as the wrong gender. A baby with, say, testes and male hormones, but rather female- looking genitals might be raised as a girl, by mistake. In many cases, these kids would grow up with a male identity and relatively masculine gender expression, even though they were raised female. Their biology may trump their learning.

On the other hand, anthropologist Margaret Mead found cultures where women managed all the business affairs, other cultures where men and women shared responsibility for raising children, and still others where both men and women were warlike. This suggests that social learning certainly influences behavior.

3. Have students form co-ed groups of four.

Explain that people will be taking turns acting as Speakers and Listeners. There will be one to three Listeners at a time and one to three Speakers. The Speakers will be given a question to address. Their job is **to share the floor, if there's more than one person of their gender in the group, for the entire time** allotted, until you flash the lights. The Listeners' job is **just to listen**. They may not express agreement or disagreement or ask questions of the Speakers. Their job is to give the Speakers their undivided, rapt attention. They may nod, lean forward, and make eye contact; but they may not make faces or otherwise express their own opinions while acting as Listeners.

After exactly two minutes, you will flash the lights and the Speaker should finish his or her thought and then turn all attention to you (the teacher). Acknowledge that you realize that many people will not be finished with all they have to say. It is important to keep the process moving rapidly so that everyone gets a chance to participate and so that they leave class with lots to think about ... and to **keep** talking about.

When you have everyone's attention, you will pose another question and everyone will switch roles; the former Speakers now act as Listeners and vice versa. Flip a coin to decide whether guys or girls will be the first to act as Speakers.

Questions to pose are as follow:

- a. Guys, what do you **like** about being a man and what's **difficult** about it?
- b. Girls, what do you **like** about being a woman and what's **difficult** about it?
- c. Guys, describe women ... those you know personally and/or those in the media.
- d. Girls, describe men ... those you know personally and/or those in the media.

4. Use a "fishbowl" exercise to address role extremes and stereotypes. Here's how:

Put a circle of four chairs, facing one another, in the center of the room. If guys were the first Speakers in the previous activity, have girls be first in this one or vice versa. Whichever gender is to be first, invite four volunteers of that gender to sit in the chairs in the "fishbowl". They will have a five or ten minute conversation, in response to a question or questions you will pose.

At first, observers may only listen. However, after everyone in the fishbowl has had at least one opportunity to speak, you, as the facilitator, may decide to stop the conversation long enough to invite others of the same gender to tap a fishbowl participant on the shoulder and

take his or her place. Whenever the conversation seems to need a boost, you may pose another question. You may also, at some point, add a fifth chair and invite people of the other gender to take that chair in order to ask a question of the four people in the fishbowl.

Ask the guys' fishbowl, for example:

What myths and stereotypes about men make you most angry or frustrated?

*What do you think are the **facts** (what accurate information should replace those myths and stereotypes)?*

Do you think some young men grow up believing those fallacies? Why?

Men have higher rates of homicide, suicide, and heart disease than women. Do you think that is partly a function of gender role extremes? Why or why not? How else do guys get limited or hurt or even killed by gender role extremes or stereotypes?

What do you wish women understood about men?

Ask the girls' fishbowl, for example:

What myths and stereotypes about women make you most angry or frustrated?

*What do you think are the **facts** (what accurate information should replace those myths and stereotypes)?*

Do you think some young women grow up believing those fallacies? Why?

Women have higher rates of anorexia and bulimia than men, both of which can be fatal. Do you think that is partly a function of gender role extremes? Why or why not? How else do girls get limited or hurt or even killed by gender role extremes or stereotypes?

What do you wish men understood about women?

5. Debrief the exercise by helping the class distinguish between “**gender roles/expressions**”, which are not inherently “good” or “bad”, and “**role extremes**” and “**role stereotypes**” which can, at the least, limit an individual's potential and, at their most destructive, cost lives.

Point out that traditional Western views of masculinity, for example, include such traits as courage, independence, and the desire to protect others. Traditional Western femininity includes traits such as beauty, sensitivity, and the desire to nurture others. Help students recognize that each of these characteristics could be considered a strength, an asset, or a very normal healthy human trait. Thus, there is nothing inherently wrong with any of these attributes. All are good.

Then discuss why, even though each one **can** be complimentary, all can also cause problems and pain. They do this when they are either carried to extremes or turned into stereotypes. Write the terms “**EXTREMES**” and “**STEREOTYPES**” on the blackboard and

ask for explanations and examples.

Extremes:

Some roles are destructive when carried to an extreme, which is what people may do to **prove** their masculinity or femininity. A man's need to prove he has courage, may lead him to fight and die in homicide. His need to prove that he is independent may lead to risk-taking with sex and drugs and, in turn, lead to HIV infection. A woman's need to prove that she is traditionally beautiful and, hence, desirable, may lead her to sexual risk-taking and, in turn, to unplanned pregnancy or HIV.

Stereotypes:

Gender expression can also be destructive when roles become stereotypes ... when people start to believe that a whole group of people is alike (or should be). Then, people feel they have to **make** themselves fit the description, even if it isn't really them ... or they feel they cannot **let** themselves fit the description, even if it is really them. Suppose a woman really doesn't care for children or enjoy nurturing others, but feels she should be a mother anyway, because her feelings are somehow unnatural ... **all** women are supposed to like taking care of people. Suppose a guy would really make a wonderful nurse, but he doesn't let himself go into nursing because only women are supposed to enjoy or be good at taking care of others. At its most destructive, trying to be something one is not, or **not** to be something one is, can lead to unhappiness, depression, or even suicide.

6. Hand out the **Gender Roles Homework**. There are four different **Family/Friend** assignments. You can hand them out randomly, or give each student all four and have them choose which one they would like to do.

Each student should also receive one copy of the **Individual Homework Exercise**, as an alternative, for the same credit.

Summarize the lesson:

I think this lesson is really about:

- *the importance of communication between the sexes,*
- *decreasing our need for damaging role extremes and stereotypes,*
- *recognizing how much people have in common, regardless of their genders, and*
- *developing appreciation for people who can't or don't conform to gender stereotypes.*

Gender Role Transparency

GENDER EXPRESSION:

All the ways that a person communicates to the world what it means to them to be male or female ... how they act (dress, walk, talk, react to an insult, etc.), what career they choose, what hobbies and chores seem most fun to them

GENDER VARIANCE:

**Not choosing
– or not being able –
to conform to your culture’s
expectations for people of your
gender**

Individual Homework Exercise on “Gender Roles”

What does it mean to you to be a man or a woman? How have you been affected by the gender role expectations of your culture(s)? This is your chance to put your thoughts on paper. You have several choices. Below are four poems showing the ways four different people might feel they've been affected by their cultures. You can write a one to two page paper in response to these poems. Or you can write your own poetry or a play or short story to express your reaction to today's class.

ONE: A MAN IS NOT A LOVER

They said, “Compete.” I did. I played to win ... instead of having fun. I guess I won.

They said, “Act tough.” I did. I learned to fight instead of how to care. I guess they're scared.

They said, “Be strong.” I did. I acted cool ... instead of being me. I guess I'm free.

But I felt crippled, when I lost my dad. I couldn't cry, though he was all I had.

And I felt sad when Mikey skinned his knee. He went to you for comfort, not to me.

I sometimes wonder if the jobs of bosses, can pay enough to make up for our losses.

I wonder if I ever can recover, from learning that a Man is not a Lover.

TWO: TO FIND THE WOMAN

“Girls are always nice.” They taught me well. So I would smile no matter howl felt. “Isn't she soft-spoken?” People smiled. I must have thought, “Be quiet and be mild.” “Ladies do for others,” I was told. So I helped out ... was always good as gold.

It got to where I never really knew what I felt or thought, or liked to do.

And then one day my daughter told her cousin that girls were dumb ... and she was mad she was one.

“Oh, no,” I thought, “What has the child been seeing, that she believes her self isn't worth being?”

Looking in the mirror ... I decide to find the woman I've learned so well to hide.

THREE: JUST NOT A JOCK

I didn't do too well at all the games. I never was the Jock ... who got the “Dames”. I couldn't change my looks to fit the part. While you were lifting weights, I did my art.

You say you paid a price for being tough? Well I paid, too ... My art wasn't enough.

I wanted kids to call me in the halls, to party, and to hang out at the malls.

I wished that girls would somehow know my name, that coaches would treat all the guys the same.

Not so much a Nerd, Just not a Jock ... I never liked the bite of locker talk. I thought I couldn't be a Marlboro Man. I thought that only other people can.

It took me years of pain, to figure out that being me is what it's all about.

FOUR: A SWIMMER AND A POET

I wasn't ever good at acting shy. I didn't look the part. I don't know why.

I always felt a klutz at nails and blusher. I never learned to flirt. They said, “Don't rush her.”

“She's simply a late bloomer,” was the answer, to explain a girl who never was a dancer.

But it was never me ... it didn't fit. I didn't like the way girls had to sit.

You say you paid a price for “cute and witty”? Well, I paid too ... I thought I wasn't pretty.

Fact is: I was. I had no way to know it.

And I was smart, a swimmer and a poet. Girls got no points for things like fixing cars. I might as well have been a kid from Mars.

It took me years before I came to see that being “woman” just meant being me!

Family/Friend Homework on Gender Roles: Exercise A

Below are eight open-ended sentences about what it means to be male or female ... in your opinion. Read them and think about how you would finish each sentence. Talk them over with a family member or another trusted adult or with a close friend. Then, together, sign the homework confirmation slip, below. Return it for credit.

1. The best thing about being a boy is (or would be):
2. The best thing about being a girl is (or would be):
3. A guy in our school would get teased, or people would at least think he was weird, if he:
4. A girl in our school would get teased, or people would at least think she was weird, if she:
5. I think girls really want guys to:
6. I think guys really want girls to:
7. If I had to pick one female hero, it would be _____, because:
8. If I had to pick one male hero, it would be _____, because:
9. If I had to pick one transgender or gender variant hero, it would be _____, because:



Family/Friend Homework on Gender Roles

EXERCISE A • CONFIRMATION SLIP

FOR FULL CREDIT, THIS EXERCISE IS DUE: _____

We have completed Gender Role Homework Exercise A.

Date: _____

_____ student's signature

_____ signature of family member or friend

Family/Friend Homework on Gender Roles: Exercise B

Below are eight open-ended sentences about what it means to be male or female ... in your opinion. Read them and think about how you would finish each sentence. Talk them over with a family member or another trusted adult or with a close friend. Then, together, sign the homework confirmation slip, below. Return it for credit.

1. Most boys I know would get praised by their parents if they:
2. Most girls I know would get praised by their parents if they:
3. A lot of teachers expect girls to:
4. A lot of teachers expect guys to:
5. I believe a real man:
6. I believe a real woman:
7. If I had to pick one female hero, it would be _____, because:
8. If I had to pick one male hero, it would be _____, because:
9. If I had to pick one transgender or gender variant hero, it would be _____, because:



Family/Friend Homework on Gender Roles

EXERCISE B • CONFIRMATION SLIP

FOR FULL CREDIT, THIS EXERCISE IS DUE: _____

We have completed Gender Role Homework Exercise B.

Date: _____

_____ student's signature

_____ signature of family member or friend

Family/Friend Homework on Gender Roles: Exercise C

Below are eight open-ended sentences about what it means to be male or female ... in your opinion. Read them and think about how you would finish each sentence. Talk them over with a family member or another trusted adult or with a close friend. Then, together, sign the homework confirmation slip, below. Return it for credit.

1. If I had a daughter, I would want her to know:
2. If I had a son, I would want him to know:
3. I wish that all women:
4. I wish that all men:
5. I wish it were easier for women to:
6. I wish it were easier for men to:
7. If I had to pick one female hero, it would be _____, because:
8. If I had to pick one male hero, it would be _____, because:
9. If I had to pick one transgender or gender variant hero, it would be _____, because:



Family/Friend Homework on Gender Roles

EXERCISE C • CONFIRMATION SLIP

FOR FULL CREDIT, THIS EXERCISE IS DUE: _____

We have completed Gender Role Homework Exercise C.

Date: _____

student's signature

signature of family member or friend

Family/Friend Homework on Gender Roles: Exercise D

Below are eleven open-ended sentences about what it means to be male or female ..In your opinion. Read them and think about how you would finish each sentence. Talk them over with a family member or another trusted adult or with a close friend. Then, together, sign the homework confirmation slip, below. Return it for credit.

1. I think parents should let their sons:
2. I think parents should let their daughters:
3. The thing I like best about my closest male friend is:
4. The thing I like best about my closest female friend is:
5. If my brother decided to become a ballet dancer, I would feel _____ because:
6. If my mother started working out, lifting weights, I would feel _____ because:
7. If my father decided to work part time, so that he could be home with the family, I would feel _____, because:
8. If my sister started walking with a long stride, the way guys often do, and posturing like a guy, I would feel _____, because:
9. If I had to pick one female hero, it would be _____, because:
10. If I had to pick one male hero, it would be _____, because:
11. If I had to pick one transgender or gender variant hero, it would be _____, because:



Family/Friend Homework on Gender Roles

EXERCISE D • CONFIRMATION SLIP

FOR FULL CREDIT, THIS EXERCISE IS DUE: _____

We have completed Gender Role Homework Exercise D.

Date: _____

_____ student's signature

_____ signature of family member or friend