

Exploring gender identity

This activity has been adapted from the activities *Gender stem statements*, *Act like a man*, *It's all in the representation*¹ and the *Power of expectations*².

Suggested duration: 35-40 minutes

Crossroads outcomes

- 1.2 Critically analyse situations, attitudes and behaviours that influence health, safety and wellbeing in different contexts.
- 3.2 Analyse the relationship between health behaviours and personal beliefs, attitudes and values.
- 3.3 Evaluate how the varied influences on attitudes and values impact on behaviours.

Crossroads content

Personal identity – *Owning yourself*

Own identity

- Aspects of identity
 - gender

Sexuality and sexual health – *Owning yourself*

Gender and sexual identities

- Factors that influence gender and sexual identities
 - diversity
 - cultural values
 - social pressures

Sexuality and sexual health – *Responding to others*

Influences on behaviour

- Influences on behaviour
 - personal values
 - social pressures
 - double standards

What do we want students to know, understand or be able to do?

- Clarify personal values and expectations related to gender.
- Challenge negative community values, attitudes and expectations relating to gender roles and gender diversity.
- Recognise the influence that gender expectations and assumptions have on personal identity, relationships and behaviours.
- Examine gender expectations, agency and the implications for social relationships

Teaching notes

This activity has been designed to enable students to explore the social construction of gender and how this may impact on various aspects of personal identity. Students will explore how views about appropriate male and female behaviour have changed over time. It also provides them with the opportunity to explore changing community attitudes to how male and females should behave. The

¹ Ollis, D, Harrison, L & Maharaj, C, 2013, *Sexuality Education Matters: Preparing pre-service teachers to teach sexuality education*, Deakin University, Burwood, Vi

² Ollis, D, & Mitchell, A, 2001, *Talking Sexual Health: a teaching and learning resources for secondary schools*, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe University for the Australian National Council on AIDS, Hepatitis C and Related Diseases (ANCAHRD)

activity allows for students to connect issues of gender to different positions of power central to adolescent behaviour.

Before students can examine power as a part of intimate relationships, they need to understand what is meant by gender and how gender is shaped by the social world in which they live. Students should be given the opportunity to identify how their behaviour and the behaviours of others is influenced by expectations associated with gender.

This activity has been designed to enable students to explore the concept of gender and the associated notions and expectations that impact on sexuality.

Teachers should be aware that the issues discussed in these activities may be confronting for some students. It is important to [establish a safe and effective classroom environment](#), where ground rules are clearly communicated. It is essential that students are encouraged to listen to and respect the values, beliefs and opinions of others.

Required resources and materials for preparation

- Board or graffiti sheets, e.g. butchers paper per group of 4-5 students
- Handout 1 – discussion questions – 1 per small group of 4-5 students
- *Marcus wants to be a man* transcript – 1 per pair minimum
- Internet access for *Like a girl* clip

Activity one – Gender expectations: (20-25 minutes)

Note: The following statements may have been previously explored through the 7-10 PDHPE curriculum. Students will have changing views on gender as they move into their senior years. Where students feel comfortable, encourage students to work with a partner to share their views and position themselves in relation to the gender-based statements.

- Students work with a partner to discuss the following gender stem statements:
 - One of the things I enjoy most about being a male/female is...
 - My friends would say that I am...
 - I act powerfully when...
 - I define masculinity as...
 - I define femininity as...
 - If I were a member of the opposite sex I would probably enjoy...
 - As a male/female, I strongly challenge the expectation that I should...
 - One of the most important things in my life is...
- In small groups, students share their responses and discuss the following:
 - Do you think personal perceptions of gender and expectations have changed since students in your class were in primary school? Why? Why not?
 - What similarities and differences were there across group responses?
 - When did students first become aware of their masculinity or femininity?
 - Where do young people get their ideas about 'appropriate' male and female behaviour? Create a list. Which of these sources can be trusted sources? Why? Why not?
 - Where can young people access information that shows the diversity of masculine and feminine behaviour in a positive way?

- Discuss with students the use of the phrases “be a man” and “act like a lady”.
 - Survey students’ familiarity and understanding of these terms.
 - Where this term is not culturally relevant for students, substitute for more familiar concepts such as “girl” or “woman”.
- Use visible space (board, graffiti sheets) to create two columns/ areas for recording student responses. As a large group share and record responses to the following two statements:
 - What does it mean to *act like a man*?
 - What does it mean to *be a lady*?
- Students record their responses under the appropriate heading. This can be done using sticky notes for each student,
- In small groups, students discuss the following questions (**Handout 1**):
 - What are the contexts in which they have come across these terms, e.g. on TV, from family members, at school?
 - What are the main themes emerging from the lists?
 - What do these say about expectations of males and females?
 - Are these attitudes still common and relevant today? Why? Why not?
 - Are there any expectations you would like to see changed? Why?
 - Are there any expectations you would like to remain? Why?
 - What does it say about social relationships?
 - What does it say about gender, sexuality and power?
 - How do individuals, groups and communities resist or challenge the representations?
 - Are expectations to ‘act like a man’ or ‘be a lady’ different in rural and urban contexts?
 - How might these expectations lead to negative outcomes?
 - Are there situations when these expectations could lead to positive outcomes?
 - On this basis, would you want to be male or female? Why?

Activity two – Who’s the man? (10 minutes)

- As a group, read the transcript *Marcus wants to be a man*.
- In small groups, students discuss the question, “What does being a man mean to you?” Students should consider responses from the earlier discussion and record discussion points to redefine what it means to be a man.
 - Where possible students could work in a combination of both single sex and mixed sex groups to determine any variations on opinions and ideas across the groups.
- As a whole group, share thoughts on “What does being a man mean to you?”
 - The discussion should focus on ideas such as looking after others (brothers, sisters, parents, grandparents, and friends), taking responsibility for decisions and actions, showing respect and support for others.

Activity three – Like a girl – the power of language: (10 minutes)

- Explain to students how language can be powerful and can send messages directly and indirectly which impact on the health, wellbeing and identity of individuals and groups.
- As a group, discuss where students have heard the term “like a girl” use, e.g. sport settings, home, and playground.

- Students work in pairs or small groups. Ask students:
 - Describe what it means to act like a girl, e.g. run like a girl, throw like a girl, cry like a girl.
 - What is the intention of the phrase in that context? For example, when someone says you throw like a girl, it is often used as an insult to express that a throw was weak or soft.
 - What message does this language and phrase send to others (including young girls)?
 - What are the implications for personal identity if this term is used in society without being challenged?
 - What are some alternative phrases that could be used instead?
- Wrap it up by watching the clip [Like a girl.](#)



Marcus wants to be a man

This is Marcus. He likes fast cars, Spaghetti, and Pixar movies make him cry [Sad background music].

Marcus wants to be a man but there is a problem; he just doesn't know what being a man means. In fact, no one does anymore! It's a full-blown man-crisis! [Sound of a rocket taking off]

It never used to be like this. We used to live in a golden age, where men were men, and women were [pause] second-class citizens.

Actually, scrap that bit about it being a 'Golden Age'. Then some bright women with big ideas had to go and spoil the party, demanding social change and gender equality for all. And everyone who wasn't a complete jerk agreed.

Marcus is also not a jerk. He's just confused. Without a solid idea of what masculinity is, he is doomed to wander through life without ever really understanding what it takes to be a man, right? Maybe not.

The truth is Marcus now has the freedom to choose the type of man he wants to become. Being a man can mean whatever you want it to. Masculinity manifests itself in many ways. It means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. So, have a think about the values that are important to you, keep doing what you love to do, and respect other people's points-of-view. If you do all these things, you'll be a man without a doubt.

Source: Cain, B. (2014). [Marcus wants to be a man](http://au.reachout.com/). Viewed at <http://au.reachout.com/>

Handout 1 - Discussion Questions

Following on from our discussion about what it means to be a “man” and a “lady”, and the list we have created, discuss the following questions with your small group.

What are the contexts in which you have come across these terms, e.g. on TV, from family members, at school?

- What do these say about expectations of males and females?
- Are these attitudes still common and relevant today? Why? Why not?
- Are there any expectations you would like to see changed? Why?
- Are there any expectations you would like to remain? Why?
- What does it say about social relationships?
- What does it say about gender, sexuality and power?
- How do individuals, groups and communities resist or challenge the representations?
- Are expectations to ‘act like a man’ or ‘be a lady’ different in rural and urban contexts?
- How might these expectations lead to negative outcomes?
- Are there situations when these expectations could lead to positive outcomes?
- On this basis, would you want to be male or female? Why?