

Act Like A Man, Act Like A Woman

Time: 75 minutes

Activity Objective:

Examine how cultural messages about gender can affect human behavior in women and men

Materials:

Flipcharts, markers, and tape

Activity:

1. Ask the participants if they have ever been told to “act like a man” or “act like a woman” based on their gender. Ask them to share some experiences in which someone has said this or something similar to them. Why did the individual say this? How did it make the participant feel?
2. Tell the participants that we are going to look more closely at these two phrases. Explain that by looking at them, we can begin to see how society can make it very difficult to be either male or female.
3. In large letters, print on a piece of flipchart paper the phrase “Act Like a Man.” Ask the participants to share their ideas about what this means. These are society’s expectations of who men should be, how men should act, and what men should feel and say. Draw a box on the paper, and write the meanings of “act like a man” inside this box. Some responses might include the following:
 - Be tough.
 - Do not cry.
 - Yell at people.
 - Show no emotions.
 - Take care of other people.
 - Do not back down
4. Once you have brainstormed your list, initiate a discussion by asking the following questions
 - Can it be limiting for a man to be expected to behave in this manner? Why?
 - Which emotions are men not allowed to express?
 - How can “acting like a man” affect a man’s relationship with his partner and children? How can social norms and expectations to “act like a man” have a negative impact on a man’s sexual and reproductive health?
 - Can men actually live outside the box? Is it possible for men to challenge and change existing gender roles?
 - What are the consequences of acting outside the box?

- Is it different for men and women in rural vs. urban areas?
- When is it OK for a man to live outside the box?

5. Now in large letters, print on a piece of flipchart paper the phrase “Act Like a Woman.” Ask the participants to share their ideas about what this means. These are society’s expectations of who women should be, how women should act, and what women should feel and say. Draw a box on the piece of paper, and write the meanings of “act like a woman” inside this box. Some responses may include the following:

- Be passive.
- Be the caretaker.
- Act sexy, but not too sexy.
- Be smart, but not too smart.
- Be quiet.
- Listen to others.
- Be the homemaker.

6. Once you have brainstormed your list, initiate a discussion by asking the following questions:

- Can it be limiting for a woman to be expected to behave in this manner? Why?
- What emotions are women not allowed to express?
- How can “acting like a woman” affect a woman’s relationship with her partner and children?
- How can social norms and expectations to “act like a woman” have a negative impact on a woman’s sexual and reproductive health?
- Can women actually live outside the box? Is it possible for women to challenge and change existing gender roles?
- What are the consequences of acting outside the box?
- Is it different for men and women in rural vs. urban areas?
- When is it OK for a woman to live outside the box?

7. Close the activity by summarizing some of the discussion and sharing any final thoughts. A final comment and question could be as follows:

The roles of men and women are changing in our society. It has slowly become less difficult to step outside of the box. Still, it is hard for men and women to live outside of these boxes. What would make it easier for men and women to live outside of the boxes?