

Activity 4: The “Man Box”

Time
1 hour

Purpose

To provide an introduction to gender norms and roles, and how they influence our lives and our work.

Materials

- Computer & link to Tony Porter video
- Internet connection
- Projection
- Screen
- Speakers
- Flip chart paper & markers

Instructions

1. Play Tony Porter video (12 minutes):
http://www.ted.com/talks/tony_porter_a_call_to_men.html
2. When the video finishes, begin a facilitated discussion on different themes in the video using the questions below. Depending on the group and size, the discussion can be in plenary or in smaller groups.
3. A good question to begin with is a general one on people’s thoughts and reactions. Below are some potential questions to ask:
 - a. What is Tony’s experience of being a boy? A man?
 - b. What is Tony referring to when he speaks of the “Man Box”? Ask participants to share examples of when they felt like they were put into a man box or woman box, or as a child, put in a boy or girl box.
 - c. What are the consequences of the Man Box in Tony’s life? On him, and on those around him (Sheila, his son, daughter, father, on broader society)?
 - d. How is the Man Box linked to poverty?
4. In the discussion, tie in comments with these points:

- a. The “man or woman box” refers to gender roles and expectations of how men, women, boys, and girls must behave; these expectations come from family, peers, society, media, stories, etc.
 - b. Sometimes the boxes compel people into harmful behavior
 - c. There are consequences when individuals do not conform to these societal expectations of gendered roles (e.g. what would have happened to Tony as a child, if he refused to have sex with Sheila?)
5. Expand on the point above about consequences when individuals do and do not conform to “the box”, and connect this to CARE’s work. In our work, we are trying to open space for individuals to behave outside of “boxes” that may reinforce inequitable or harmful social norms and expectations. For example, a “man box” may expect men to leave household chores to their wives, but our programming may seek to support men in having more equitable and supportive relationships with their wives. Another example: a “woman box” may confine women to her home, but our programs may try to support women to take leadership positions in community group settings.
6. A final key point to draw out is: This work can be difficult because it is deeply personal. In our programming, we’ve realized that we as staff are “socialized” and bring our own ideas of gender norms and roles into our work. These assumptions influence the way we understand and do our work at CARE. For example, in our HIV work, we realized that staff were uncomfortable discussing sex, and this affected their ability to promote HIV prevention strategies.

* If there is time, you can add this additional piece of the exercise: Ask participants to split into two groups (single sex if possible) and give 1 piece of flip chart paper and markers to each group.

- a. Ask each group to draw a large square. Tell them that this is a gender box.
- b. Ask the female group to draw a woman and list the qualities, roles and behavior that society expects of the ideal woman in the box. Ask the group to also list what happens to women when they do not follow these expectations and to write this outside of the box.
- c. Ask the male group to do the same for a ideal man.
- d. Tell the group they have 10 minutes to finish the project.
- e. At the end of 10 minutes, bring the groups together to share their gender boxes.
- f. Ask groups: Are these boxes representative of your community (you can ask men to comment on the woman box and vice versa)? What differences and similarities do you see? Do you think these differences are fair?

Facilitator's tips

- Tony's story is powerful and can resonate deeply with participants. Be sure to give time for people to process and share if they would like.
- Sometimes people ask why Tony is speaking to a roomful of women. The talk was at a TEDwomen conference. Also, a little bit about Tony Porter: Tony Porter is the visionary and co-founder behind the nonprofit A Call to Men: The National Association of Men and Women Committed to Ending Violence Against Women. Porter's message of engagement and self-examination has connected powerfully with numerous domestic and sexual violence programs for such high-profile groups as the National Football League and the National Basketball Association, and colleges and universities around the country, including the US Military Academy at West Point and the US Naval Academy at Annapolis. Porter is also an international lecturer for the U.S. State Department, having done extensive work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He is a faculty member of the New York State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services Academy of Addiction Studies, where he co-authored their curriculum for clinicians who work with chemically dependent African-Americans. He also specializes in developing social justice models for human service organizations