

Activity 7: Ideal Man and Woman

Time
1 hour

Purpose

To surface the difference between sex and gender, to explore the ideas of socially defined gender roles, and to recognize gender stereotypes.

Materials

- Flip chart paper & markers

Instructions

Part A

1. Ask participants to call out the first words that come to mind when you say “man”. List them out on flip chart paper. Repeat the process for “woman” on a different flip chart paper. Make sure that there are at least 2-3 words that describe biological traits (e.g. penis, breasts, menstruation).
2. Going thru each of the words under “man”, ask if any of these words can be used to describe women. Repeat for the woman’s list. For example, “can a man cook? Be gentle? Menstruate? If men are capable of cooking, why don’t more men do the cooking for their households?
3. Circle the biological traits as you go through the lists.
4. Explain that these lists illustrate the difference between sex and gender. Sex refers to biological traits. Gender refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female at a particular point in time.

Part B

1. Divide participants into groups of 4-6 (single sex if possible) and give 1 piece of flip chart paper and markers to each group.
2. Ask the female group(s) to draw a woman and list the qualities, roles and behavior that society expects of the ideal woman in the box. Ask the male group(s) to do the same for an ideal man. You can also have a women’s group do an ideal man, and vice versa.
3. Tell the group they have 10 minutes to finish the project.

4. At the end of 10 minutes, bring the groups together to share their pictures and descriptions.
5. Here are a few questions you can ask:
 - a. Are these boxes representative of your community (you can ask men to comment on the woman box and vice versa)?
 - b. What differences and similarities do you see?
 - c. Do you think these differences are fair?
 - d. What happens when a woman does not follow these expectations? What happens when a man does not follow these expectations?
 - e. How does this relate to work we do with communities? With stakeholders and people of influence?
6. In the discussion, tie in comments with these points:
 - a. These ideals relate to gender roles and societal expectations of how men, women, boys, and girls must behave;
 - b. These expectations come from family, peers, society, media, stories, etc.
 - c. Sometimes these ideals can compel people into harmful behavior
 - d. There are consequences when individuals do not conform to these societal expectations of gendered roles
5. Expand on the point above about consequences when individuals do and do not conform to “an ideal man or woman”, and connect this to CARE’s work. In our work, we are trying to open space for individuals to behave outside of “ideals” that may reinforce inequitable or harmful social norms and expectations. For example, men may be expected 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: women may be expected to stay in 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.

Facilitator’s tips

- For a fuller description of this activity, please see CARE’s Social Analysis and Action toolkit (“Ideas in Action”, p57)
http://www.care.org/careswork/whatwedo/health/downloads/social_analysis_manual.pdf

- One CARE staff member in India said, “I never understood all this gender stuff. Now I really see it. A village woman in Jarkhand is not allowed to touch the plow. That means that she can never earn the same livelihood like her husband.