

# LESSON 2

## WHAT'S THE REAL DEAL ABOUT GENDER?

### OVERVIEW

Students will create their own definitions of gender, masculinity and femininity through class discussions and analysis.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What is the difference between “sex” and “gender”?
- Who or what defines gender?
- What is the difference between gender and masculinity/femininity?
- Who or what defines masculinity/femininity?
- How does my gender impact my life and the people in my life?

### OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Explore the concepts of gender and masculinity/femininity
- Compare and contrast “nature” and “nurture” in gender
- Compare and contrast notions of masculinity and femininity
- Deconstruct some of society’s definitions of gender, masculinity and femininity
- Avoid sexist, racist or homophobic language

### MATERIALS

- Writer’s journals
- Post-It notes or index cards
- Situations (on strips of paper)

### ACTIVITIES

#### 1. Recall

Remind students they are doing a project where they will work on creating their story of who they are, or their identity. An important part of our story, or of

who we are, is **where** we are, our “place”. Ask students to recall what they remember most from the “place” lesson.

#### 2. Introduce gender

Explain to students that as much as “place” defines who we are, our identity is also shaped by our gender. Ask students to volunteer their definitions of “gender.” Explain to students that a gender is a category society uses, to classify whether we are considered male or female.

#### 3. Mind map

Divide students into small groups, preferably mixed gender. Ask the groups to create a mind map (or word web) about what it means “to be a man.” Ask students to give the culture or society’s definitions and descriptions of masculinity (“to be a man”) on each “leg” of the web. Then ask them to create a mind map about what it means to “be a woman” or femininity.

Responses you may receive to describe masculinity:

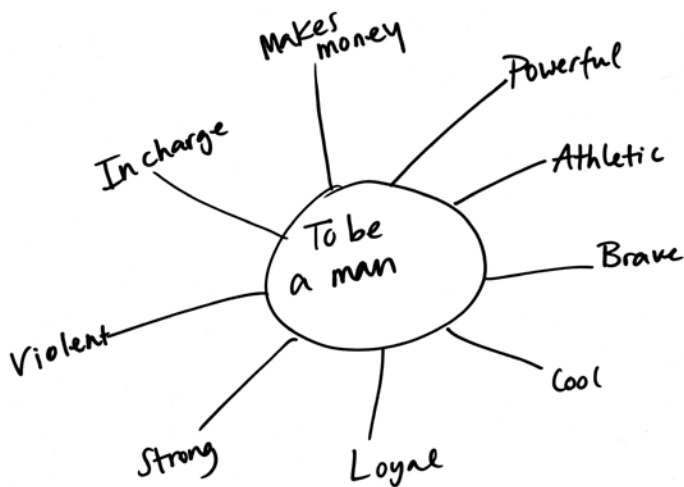
- Making money
- Being (physically) strong
- Suppressing emotions
- “Scoring” sexually
- Being heterosexual
- Having a job
- Being in charge of a family

#### **Note to educators**

Masculinity and gender are slightly different concepts. Masculinity comprises the rules and behaviors one can follow to be considered the gender of “male/man.”

While the gender of man has remained a constant status category, the rules (“masculinities”) one can follow to achieve this status vary by region and culture, have changed in history, and are different for different stages of the life course.

- Being cool
- Being a father
- Proud
- Powerful
- Being athletic
- Being brave
- Not being afraid of violence/using violence
- Humorous
- Nurturing
- Loyal to friends



Responses you may receive to describe femininity:

- Considerate
- Quiet
- Submissive
- Chatty
- Good communicator
- Bad at math
- Well groomed/Hygiene
- Emotionally strong
- Well-organized
- Clean
- Multi-tasker
- Practical
- Curvaceous
- Non-violent
- Modest
- Physically weaker
- Caring
- Childbirth
- Breastfeeding

Note that these characteristics are what society often tells us are appropriate for each gender. These may well be stereotypes that we do not agree with on a personal level and that do not describe everyone we know.

#### 4. "Nature" or "nurture"?

Write "woman" and "man" on the board and make two columns under each word. Label one column for each word "Nature" (or "Sex") and the other "Nurture" (or "Gender"). Starting with one group, ask students to tell you one item from their mind map for "to be a man" and to state if the pressure or expectation to be this way is biologically ("Nature") or socially ("Nurture") determined. *If students assign a masculinity trait to the "nature" category, ask them if a boy or a man who does **not** possess that trait is a man, or not. **For example, are all men strong? Is a male who is not heterosexual still a male? What about a man who does not make money?***

Woman		Man	
Nature	Nurture	Nature	Nurture
• Child birth	• Quiet	• Being a father	• Making money
• Breast feeding	• Caring	• Physically strong	• Humorous
	• Chatty		• Loyal to friends
	• Practical		

Ask the whole class if they agree and allow them to discuss as needed. Make sure that your students find the correct category, asking them open-ended questions if they do not come to it independently. Go around the groups, getting one new characteristic from each group until you have all of their responses for "to be a man."