



Exercise: Act like a Man / Act like a Lady

Rationale: This exercise invites participants to explore gender norms and the consequences we face when we go against them.

Time: 60-90 minutes

Materials:

This exercise requires two facilitators of different genders
Large sheets of paper or a white board for writing comments
Separate space for men and women to gather

Directions:

1. Explain to participants that you will separate them by gender and will ask them to think about gender expectations. You will then bring them back together to have a group conversation.
2. Divide the group by gender and have each group participate in a conversation with similar prompts.
3. At the top of the paper for the group of females, write “Act Like a Lady.” For the males, write “Act Like a Man.”
4. Ask each group what messages they receive that tell them what it means to Act Like a Lady or Act Like a Man in the following areas:

Clothing/Physical Appearance

Physical Activity

Hobbies

Toys

Colors

Hanging Out

Dating/relationships

Communication

Economics

Education

Professions

Allow 10 minutes for this portion.

4. For both groups, take a second piece of large paper and draw a box in the middle of the paper with arrows pointing outward from the center of the box. At the top left of the paper, draw a column that says “Consequences” on the left and “Names” on the right.

5. Ask the group to imagine that the box represents everything from the first list that the group generated. Now ask the group to list the consequences when someone steps outside that box. Write the responses on the chart.
6. Ask the group to also think about the specific names we call people who step outside the box. Write the responses on the chart. Allow another 10 minutes for this portion.
7. Bring the two groups together and have each facilitator read the lists their group generated.
8. Lead a whole group conversation using some or all of the following questions.

Discussion:

- Who taught you everything that's in the box?
- What were you glad or upset about to see in the box?
- What has happened to you when you have stepped out of the box? How did it make you feel?
- How do the items in these boxes affect relationships across genders?
- What were some of the assumptions we made about sexual orientation?
- What do heterosexism and/or homophobia have to do with the boxes?
- Are people interested in getting rid of the boxes? Why or why not?
- What do you want to tell people of your gender?
- What do you want to tell people who are not your gender?

