

## **“ACT LIKE A MAN, ACT LIKE A LADY”**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this activity is to clearly identify the socially constructed gender roles that are currently prevalent in the United States. Because this is about rigid and oppositionally located gender and not the continuum of gender students in this activity are asked to identify only what it means to be “masculine” and “feminine” in the United States and therefore does not incorporate transgender identities.

### **ACTIVITY**

Have students get into small groups and provide markers and flip chart paper. Inform them that they will have 10–15 minutes to do the following:

- Have one half of the groups in class draw the outline of a “flower” covering most of their paper. Inside the flower, they should list all of the answers that come to mind when they hear the phrase, “Act like a lady.” Examples include, “cross your legs” and “wear make up at all times.” Then in the area around the flower list all the things that happen to women if they do not adhere to these expectations. For example, “called a bitch,” “not hired or promoted” and “harassed on the street.”
- Have the other half of the groups in class do the same basic activity...draw a “box” covering most of their paper. Inside the box they should list all of the answers that come to mind when they hear the phrase, “Act like a man.” Examples include, “don’t cry” or “never ask for directions.” Then in the area around the box list all the things that happen to men if they do not adhere to these expectations. For example, “called a fag,” “beaten up” and “never picked for the team.”

After they have completed their lists, post them around the room and have students go around and read all of the other lists. Ask them to look for the common themes in the lists. When finished, ask them what they saw and note the commonalities on the board, etc.

### **Analysis**

After students have shared, discuss in more depth the points below and use it as a segue into a deeper discussion of the social construction of gender roles versus gender identity, how gender roles and their maintenance serves as the foundation of sexism and heterosexism, and the role that the transgender community serves as a liberator for everyone. Specific points to address include: a) These are impossible to attain; wouldn’t really even want to, b) Violence is a key part of the process of creating and maintaining gender roles, c) Homophobia is also a key part of it as well, d) Notice how the female is used to degrade men, e) Understand how this heightens a binary around gender and makes it much easier to keep sexism in place.