

WHY US?
LEFT BEHIND AND DYING



Video Curriculum Modules



**Lesson 7: HIV –
Masculinity**

LEARNING WAS NEVER LIKE THIS



Lesson 7: Masculinity

Standards:

Health:

2.12.1

2.12.2

2.13.3

2.12.4

2.12.5

2.12.7

2.12.8

Science:

2.1

Skills Practiced and Gained:

1.1—1.7

2.1—2.3

Overview

In mainstream US and African society, there are deep-seated notions of masculinity and femininity. Moreover, for different ethnic groups, these notions are entwined with particular historical events, cultural beliefs and societal perceptions—so much so, that mainstream definitions of masculinity and femininity are very different for different ethnic groups. Definitions of masculinity pose particular challenges in African and African American communities especially in its effect on the spread of HIV/AIDS. The video module, “*Masculinity*,” examines how public and group perceptions of black men and masculinity have contributed to the spread of HIV/AIDS. This lesson provides the opportunity not only to examine notions of masculinity and femininity in African and African American cultures but also in other cultures and ethnic groups.



Key Concepts

Definitions of male and female roles; masculinity and femininity

Impact of social and cultural stigmas

Social determinants of health

Materials for Activities and Educator Background Knowledge

There is one reading from the Center for Gender Sanity entitled Resource on Gender and Sexuality Diversity. The reading can be found appended as a PDF document at the end of this lesson module. This reading is helpful in completing *Activities 7.1* and *7.2*.



Procedure

Part I

View “Masculinity” video module. After viewing the module use the following questions to facilitate group discussion or give the questions as prompts for journal entries.



Discussion / Journal Questions

- 1) **W**hat new information did you gather from the video module?
- 2) **H**ow does masculinity contribute to the high rates of HIV/AIDS in African and African American communities?
- 3) **W**hat other questions or comments do you have?

Part II

Sex, gender, gender expression, and sexual orientation are interlinked in a rigid binary that makes acting outside of those roles very difficult, even punishable. The following activities and reading allows students/participants to examine how these dynamics limit our behaviors and influence us to be and act in accordance with firmly established gender norms.

1) Reading 7.1

Have students examine the chart on sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. Read the article that follows the chart.

2) Activities 7.1 and 7.2

- a) Divide into groups and fill out the chart on men and women preferably on large paper or on a board. Groups can be mixed gender or single gender.
- b) Post the four categories—sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation—on different walls/locations in the seminar room/classroom.

Part II (continued)

2) Activities 7.1 and 7.2 (continued)

c) Have groups post their findings and notes from their small group discussions.

d) In the larger group, discuss the following questions:

- What are your initial reactions to the responses posted by the small groups?
- Do you believe that the four categories—sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation—are independent? Why or why not?
- How does society make us believe that all four categories are strongly interlinked?
- What pressures do people experience when they don't conform to the binary of “normal man” and “normal woman”?
- What are the benefits and harms of this type of socialization?
- Would the charts change if we were to examine the norms as Black men and Black women? Asian men and Asian women? Latino men and Latina women? (and so on) Why or why not?

Closure



Sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation are areas of some of the strongest socialization we experience as humans. Use the following questions to facilitate group discussion or give the questions as prompts for journal entries.

Closure (continued)

Discussion / Journal Questions

- 1) What do you feel you are “supposed to do” or “have to do” because of your biological sex?
- 2) From where or from whom do these pressures to conform come?
- 3) Do you pressure others to conform to ideas of “normal” masculinity or femininity?
- 4) What are the benefits and negative consequences of acting in line with these pressures? Of resisting these pressures?
- 5) Does understanding gender and sexuality diversity change your thoughts about how you might act? Why or why not?



Activity 7.1

Fill out the following chart on large paper or on the board.

In US Mainstream Society...

(SEX) You are a MAN if you have these biological features:

(GENDER IDENTITY) You think of yourself as MALE by doing/saying these things:

(GENDER EXPRESSION) You show others your MASCULINITY by acting/dressing/speaking this way:

(SEXUAL ORIENTATION) You demonstrate your ATTRACTION TO WOMEN by the following:

If you do not conform to all four expectations, you can expect others to react to you this way:

Activity 7.2

Fill out the following chart on large paper or on the board.

In US Mainstream Society...

(SEX) You are a **WOMAN** if you have these biological features:

(GENDER IDENTITY) You think of yourself as **FEMALE** by doing/saying these things:

(GENDER EXPRESSION) You show others your **FEMININITY** by acting/dressing/speaking this way:

(SEXUAL ORIENTATION) You demonstrate your **ATTRACTION TO MEN** by the following:

If you do not conform to all four expectations, you can expect others to react to you this way:



Key to Activity 7.1

Fill out the following chart on large paper or on the board.

In US Mainstream Society...

(SEX) You are a MAN if you have these biological features:

XY chromosome, penis, testicles, facial hair, etc...

(GENDER IDENTITY) You think of yourself as MALE by doing/saying these things:

I am a man. I am a boy. Pronouns include he, him, and his. Etc.

(GENDER EXPRESSION) You show others your MASCULINITY by acting/dressing/speaking this way:

Wears pants

Wears hair short

Participates in sports

Cares about muscles

Is tough and doesn't show soft emotions like sadness, caring, tenderness, vulnerability, etc.

And so on...

(SEXUAL ORIENTATION) You demonstrate your ATTRACTION TO WOMEN by the following:

Dates girls/women

Comments on attractiveness of girls/women

Is disturbed or disgusted by the idea of being with men

And so on...

If you do not conform to all four expectations, you can expect others to react to you this way:

People call you sissy, girly, weak, etc.

People tell you to toughen up

People tell you to work out or get into sports

People call you gay, faggot, etc.

And so on...



Key to Activity 7.2

Fill out the following chart on large paper or on the board.

In US Mainstream Society...

(SEX) You are a WOMAN if you have these biological features:

XX chromosome, breasts, uterus, ovaries, vagina, etc.

(GENDER IDENTITY) You think of yourself as FEMALE by doing/saying these things:

I am a woman. I am a girl. Pronouns include she, her, and hers. Etc.

(GENDER EXPRESSION) You show others your FEMININITY by acting/dressing/speaking this way:

Wears skirts

Wears long hair

Participates in cooking, knitting, painting, etc.

Cares about looks, figure, prettiness, etc.

Is soft and emotional, cries easily, takes care of people, etc.

And so on...

(SEXUAL ORIENTATION) You demonstrate your ATTRACTION TO MEN by the following:

Dates boys/men

Comments on attractiveness and desirability of boys/men

Tries to be physically attractive to boys/men

Is disturbed or disgusted by the idea of being with women

And so on...

If you do not conform to all four expectations, you can expect others to react to you this way:

People call you tomboy, messy, rough, etc.

People tell you to be nice and kind

People tell you to wear makeup or wear dresses or sit still

People call you butch, dyke, etc.

And so on...

Diagram of Sex and Gender

"normal" man

"normal" woman

BIOLOGICAL SEX (anatomy, chromosomes, hormones)

male

intersex

female



GENDER IDENTITY (psychological sense of self)

man

two-spirit/third gender

woman



GENDER EXPRESSION (communication of gender)

masculine

androgynous

feminine



SEXUAL ORIENTATION (erotic response)

attracted to women

bisexual/asexual

attracted to men



Sex and Gender

The "sex" scale refers to biological sex and includes external genitalia, internal reproductive structures, chromosomes, hormone levels, and secondary sex characteristics such as breasts, facial and body hair, and fat distribution. These characteristics are objective in that they can be seen and measured (with appropriate technology). The scale consists not just of two categories (male and female) but is actually a continuum, with most people existing somewhere near one end or the other. The space more in the middle is occupied by intersex people (hermaphrodites), who have combinations of characteristics typical of males and those typical of females, such as both a testis and an ovary, or XY chromosomes (the usual male pattern) and a vagina, or they may have features that are not completely male or completely female, such as an organ that could be thought of as a small penis or a large clitoris, or an XXY chromosomal pattern.

Gender identity is how people think of themselves and identify in terms of sex (man, woman, boy, girl). Gender identity is a psychological quality; unlike biological sex, it can't be observed or measured (at least by current means), only reported by the individual. Like biological sex, it consists of more than two categories, and there's space in the middle for those who identify as a third gender, both (two-spirit), or neither. We lack language for this intermediate position because everyone in our culture is supposed to identify unequivocally with one of the two extreme categories. In fact, many people feel that they have masculine and feminine aspects of their psyches, and some people, fearing that they do, seek to purge themselves of one or the other by acting in exaggerated sex-stereotyped ways.

Gender expression is everything we do that communicates our sex/gender to others: type of clothing, hair styles, mannerisms, way of speaking, roles we take in interactions, etc. This communication may be purposeful or accidental. It could also be called social gender because it relates to interactions between people. Trappings of one gender or the other may be forced on us as children or by dress codes at school or work. Gender expression is a continuum, with feminine at one end and masculine at the other. In between are gender expressions that are androgynous (neither masculine nor feminine) and those that combine elements of the two (sometimes called gender bending). Gender expression can vary for an individual from day to day or in different situations, but most people can identify a range on the scale where they feel the most comfortable. Some people are comfortable with a wider range of gender expression than others.

Sexual orientation indicates who we are erotically attracted to. The ends of this scale are labeled "attracted to women" and "attracted to men," rather than "homosexual" and "heterosexual," to avoid confusion as we discuss the concepts of sex and gender. In the mid-range is bisexuality; there are also people who are asexual (attracted to neither men nor women). We tend to think of most people as falling into one of the two extreme categories (attracted to women or attracted to men), whether they are straight or gay, with only a small minority clustering around the bisexual middle. However, Kinsey's studies showed that most people are in fact not at one extreme of this continuum or the other, but occupy some position between.

For each scale, the popular notion that there are two distinct categories, with everyone falling neatly into one or the other, is a social construction. The real world (Nature, if you will) does not observe these boundaries. If we look at what actually exists, we see that there is middle ground. To be sure, most people fall near one end of the scale or the other, but very few people are actually at the extreme ends, and there are people at every point along the continuum.

Gender identity and sexual orientation are resistant to change. Although we don't yet have definitive answers to whether these are the result of biological influences, psychological ones, or both, we do know that they are established very early in life, possibly prenatally, and there are no methods that have been proven effective for changing either of these. Some factors that make up biological sex can be changed, with more or less difficulty. These changes are not limited to people who change their sex: many women undergo breast enlargement, which moves them toward the extreme female end of the scale, and men have penile enlargements to enhance their maleness, for example. Gender expression is quite flexible for some people and more rigid for others. Most people feel strongly about expressing themselves in a way that's consistent with their inner gender identity and experience discomfort when they're not allowed to do so.

The four scales are independent. Our cultural expectation is that men occupy the extreme left ends of all four scales (male, man, masculine, attracted to women) and women occupy the right ends. But a person with male anatomy could be attracted to men (gay man), or could have a gender identity of "woman" (transsexual), or could have a feminine gender expression on occasion (cross-dresser). A person with female anatomy could identify as a woman, have a somewhat masculine gender expression, and be attracted to women (butch lesbian). It's a mix-and-match world and there are as many combinations as there are people who think about their gender.

This schema is not necessarily "reality," but it's probably closer than the two-box system. Reality is undoubtedly more complex. Each of the four scales could be broken out into several scales. For instance, the sex scale could be expanded into separate scales for external genitalia, internal reproductive organs, hormone levels, chromosome patterns, and so forth. An individual would probably not fall on the same place on each of these. "Sex" is a summary of scores for several variables.

There are conditions that exist that don't fit anywhere on a continuum: some people have neither the XX (typical female) chromosomal pattern nor the XY pattern typical of males, but it is not clear that other patterns, such as just X, belong anywhere on the scale between XX and XY. Furthermore, the scales may not be entirely separate: if gender identity and sexual orientation are found to have a biological component, they may overlap with the sex scale.

Using the model presented here is something like using a spectrum of colors to view the world, instead of only black and white. It doesn't fully account for all the complex shadings that exist, but it gives us a richer, more interesting picture. Why look at the world in black and white (marred by a few troublesome shades of gray) when there's a whole rainbow out there?