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Gender and Health



The way we experience gender is a basic part of how we experience life. Children learn early that the differences between girls' bodies and boys' bodies mean girls and boys are expected to look, think, feel, and act in very different ways for their entire lives.

Gender roles and expectations vary according to each community's traditions, culture, laws, and religions. In most places, boys and men have higher status. They have rights and privileges that girls and women do not. When women's status is much lower than men's, women experience more violence, have less access to medical care, and less power to make decisions on issues that affect their health. So exploring the unspoken and sometimes even unconscious rules about gender in your community and working for gender equality are important parts of supporting girls' and women's health.

Making these changes is not easy! Some people support unequal gender roles — they like things the way they are. Others might not like inequality, but they think it is like the weather — you can't change it. Don't let them discourage you. You are joining a growing wave of organizers, health educators, and everyday people who are using their power and creativity to bring about the changes that will ensure improvements in women's health.

Gender is not biology

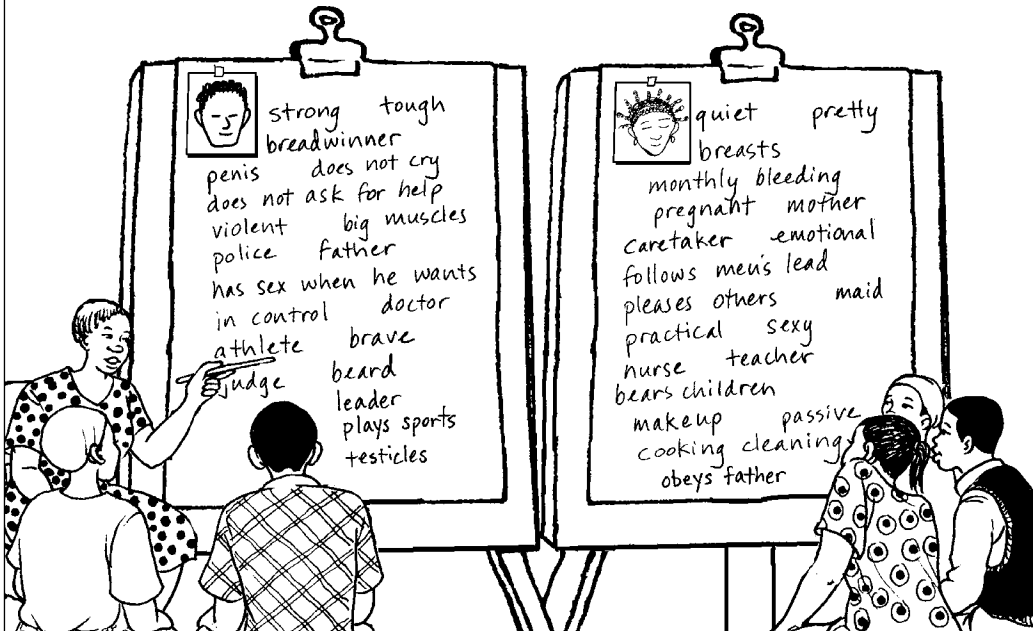
When a baby is born, people ask, “Is it a boy or a girl?” You can look at the baby’s genitals for the answer. The baby’s sex is female if she has a vulva, and the baby’s sex is male if he has a penis. These sex traits are part of biology. But gender is different. Our cultures, traditions, and laws assign male and female gender roles. They say women do housework, and men make important community decisions. People often confuse gender roles with sex roles and treat them as “natural” or unchangeable — “just the way things are.”

To understand the connection between gender and health, we have to understand which parts of being male and which parts of being female are biological, and which are decided by people. Knowing the difference can help us decide what we can change and where we should focus our efforts to remedy the inequality of men and women in our communities.

Activity

Sex and gender roles: What is the difference?

- Put a picture of a man and a woman on 2 separate sheets of paper. Ask people to say everything they think of when they hear the word “man” and “woman,” and write their ideas on each paper. Ask people to think of physical qualities, personality traits, abilities, roles in the family and community, and how men or women are supposed to feel and to act. Then read both lists out loud to the group.



Activity**Sex and gender roles: What is the difference?** *(continued)*

- 2 Switch the pictures, so the woman's face is at the top of the list of ideas for "man" and the man's face is at the top of the list of ideas for "woman." Ask the group which words in the "man" list absolutely cannot describe women, such as "father" or "testicles." Cross these words out. Explain that all the crossed-out words have to do with the male sex. The words that remain describe the gender roles that society expects men to follow.
- 3 Do the same with the words in the "woman" list. Cross out the words that absolutely cannot describe a man, such as "monthly bleeding" and "bears children." The crossed-out words relate to women's bodies, their sex. The words that remain describe gender roles.
- 4 Discuss the difference between **sex** (physically being a man or a woman) and **gender roles** — the ways women and men are expected to look, feel, think, and act. Here are some possible questions:
 - How would you describe the difference between sex and gender?
 - Do you agree with all the ideas that describe women and all the ideas that describe men? Which do you disagree with? Why?
 - Which gender roles are most often shared between men and women?
 - How do boys and girls learn their gender roles?
- 5 Ask the group what other things might affect gender roles, such as age, education, skin color, or whether a person owns property or belongs to a certain caste or clan. How are gender expectations different for women and men with higher or lower status? Who has more power to make decisions for themselves and others? Who has more freedom to say what they think, and do what they decide is best?
- 6 Finally, discuss how differences in gender expectations affect women's health and men's health. Which roles and expectations make it easier for women or men to stay healthy? Which expectations may cause more health problems in women or in men?

Sometimes it is better to work with men and women separately so that people have a chance to be more open and honest.



Seeing masculinity and femininity

Gender roles create expectations about what is an ideal (masculine) man and what is an ideal (feminine) woman. When gender expectations in a community include mutual respect and appreciation for differences in roles and identities, men and women can experience life with satisfaction, belonging, and accomplishment. But feminine roles often have a much lower status than masculine roles. Unequal status between genders is especially harmful when being male means having control over women or any person who appears or feels more feminine.

One way to see differences in men's and women's status is to reflect on the qualities of femininity and masculinity that most people admire. This can help people think about which qualities are approved by the community, and why. This kind of reflection also helps a group understand how most women and men usually act to reinforce gender expectations, and what happens if a person acts differently.

Activity

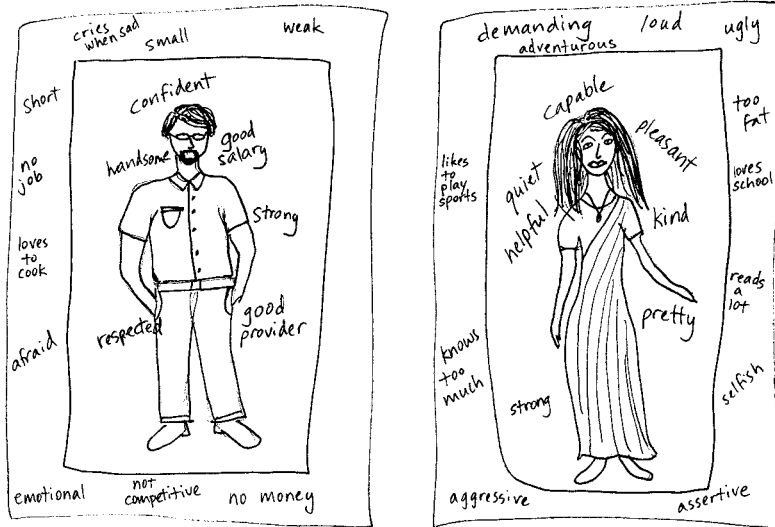
Gender boxes

- 1 Divide your group into smaller groups of women or men. Give each small group a large piece of paper.
- 2 Ask each group to draw a picture of an "ideal" woman or an "ideal" man, either their own sex or the opposite one. They should dress the person in an ideal way. Ask them to then draw a big box around the picture so the whole person is inside the box.
- 3 Next ask the groups to write or draw around the body inside the box all the qualities of an ideal woman or man. Ask people to think of the ways women and men are expected to look and act in the community, in the work they do, in the family, and in sexual relationships.

What are men supposed to be good at? What are women supposed to be good at?
What feelings are OK for men to show? For women to show?
- 4 Then ask the groups to think of qualities that many women or men have that are not considered ideal. Write or draw these qualities on the paper outside the box. You can ask: What feelings should men hide? What about women?

Activity

Gender boxes (continued)



- 5 Bring the groups together and have them present their drawings.
- 6 Discuss the drawings and the expectations they show. For example, ask how the ideal man or woman benefits from the qualities or actions inside the box. Which qualities or actions are considered weaker or less important? Why?
- 7 Ask the group if they think it is difficult for most women or men to achieve these ideals? Why? What happens to people who do not fit inside the "ideal" box or to people who try to live outside the "ideal" boxes? Are there both benefits and disadvantages to being different? In what ways? (You might note that real people have a bit of both boxes.) Ask the group: How might the boxes affect men's and women's health?
- 8 Then ask: Where do the boxes come from? When do people learn the "rules" about being girls, boys, women or men? Who teaches the rules? How much comes from parents? How much from other authorities like teachers, coaches, or religious leaders? How much from the media — TV, advertising, films, songs, and videos?

To continue exploring gender roles with a group of women only, you can do the activity, What if there were no gender boxes? (page 46).

Imagine a world without gender boxes

Women often talk with each other privately about their experiences and feelings. Talking about the difficulties in their lives — especially about difficult relationships with men — helps women feel less alone. But this kind of talk usually does not question the causes of their difficulties or how things could be different. A reflection and sharing activity can provide a comfortable and safe place for women to discuss their experiences and compare their roles with men's roles.

This activity can be done following the Gender boxes activity to help a group consider how gender roles and expectations could change in ways that enable women to have more control over their health.

Activity

What if there were no gender boxes?

Do this activity with a group of women and girls, without men or boys present. (You can adapt this for men and boys.) Show the group the gender boxes that were drawn using the activity on pages 44 to 45. Explain that this activity can help us to think about how things could be different — what if there were no gender boxes at all?

- 1 Guided reflection.** To make the setting feel more intimate and less like a meeting, ask the women to form a circle. You might want to make the room darker or play soft music. Ask the women to close their eyes, breathe deeply, and imagine themselves as little girls. Explain that you will be asking them to first remember and then to imagine things. The women will just think to themselves, not answer out loud — this is a silent exercise.

Speak calmly and slowly, and ask questions such as these:

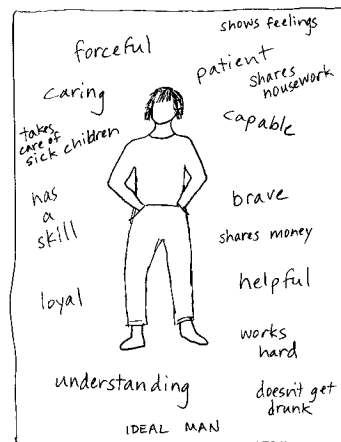
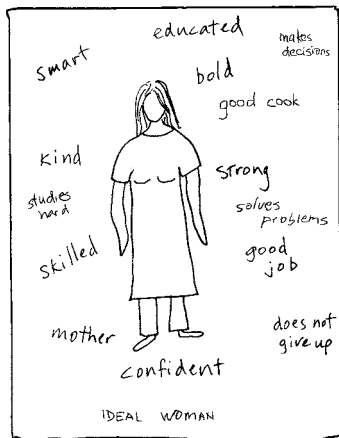
- When did you first realize that being a girl was different from being a boy? How did you realize this, and how did you feel?
- How would being a girl have been different if boys and girls had been treated more alike? If they had the same freedoms and the same responsibilities?
- What would more freedom look like for a man? How would men's lives be different if their roles and responsibilities were shared equally with women?
- What would more freedom look like for a woman? How would women's lives be different if their roles and responsibilities were shared equally with men?

Wait a minute or two after each question to give each woman enough time to think.

Activity

What if there were no gender boxes? *(continued)*

- 2 Sharing in small groups.** Ask the women to open their eyes and invite them to form small groups to share some of their thoughts from the guided reflection. Each woman should have enough time to talk while the other women listen quietly.
- 3 Imagining a world without gender boxes.** Once everyone has shared, ask the women to stay in their small groups and discuss the following questions:
- If girls and boys were treated more alike, how would girls act differently than they do now? How would they feel?
 - If women had the same freedom, power, and responsibilities as men, how would women act? How would they feel?
 - How would boys and men act and feel?
 - How would your own life be different? How would life be different for other women you know? For your daughter? For your mother?
- 4 Drawings without boxes.** You may also want to ask the groups to create new drawings to show what life would be like without gender boxes. Give each group a large piece of paper and ask them to draw the ideal woman in a world where women have the same freedom, power, expectations, and responsibilities as men. You can ask them to draw an ideal man too.

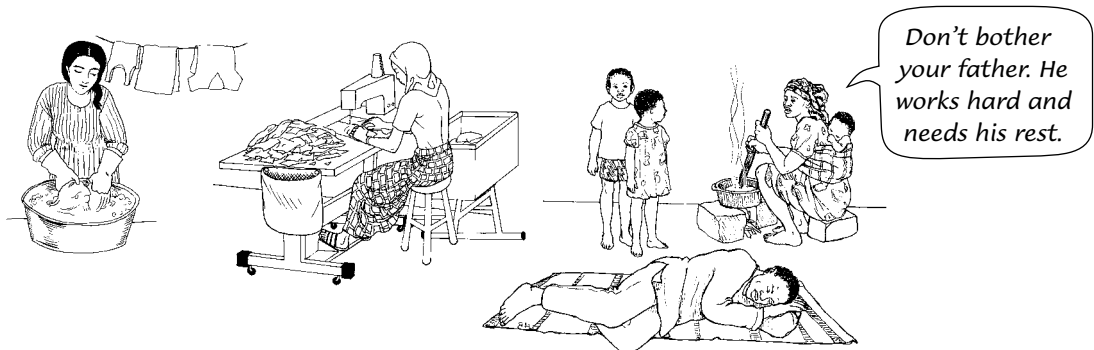


- 5** To end, ask the groups to share their visions and drawings. You can ask everyone to say what would be different for the health of women and girls, and for the health of men and boys. Be sure to leave time for the participants to share how they felt while doing the activity and what they are thinking about now after the discussions and drawings.

Gender and work

In every community, some types of work are considered “men’s work” and other types of work are considered “women’s work.” These differences in expectations about work are part of gender roles.

The work that many women do — caring for children and the daily needs of the family — is often not highly valued nor even thought of as work. This is one cause of women’s low status and unfair workloads. Discussing gender roles and work can help people think about changes in women’s lives that could improve women’s health.



Activity

A day in the life

Making lists of the activities that men and women do in a day can provide good material for discussing work and gender. Sometimes men or women may not have a very good idea of what the other gender does all day! You can also adapt this activity with a women-only group to raise awareness about their household responsibilities as work to be valued.

- 1 Divide your group into smaller groups of either men or women. Ask the groups of men to make a list of all the activities a typical man completes in a normal day, starting from the time he wakes and ending when he goes to sleep. Ask the women to do the same thing for women. You might also ask people to think about how long each activity takes, where it happens, and who helps them with the activity.
- 2 After the first list is complete, ask the men’s groups to make another list with all of the activities they can think of that women do in the same time period, and ask the women’s groups to make a list about men.
- 3 When both lists are finished, share them in the big group.

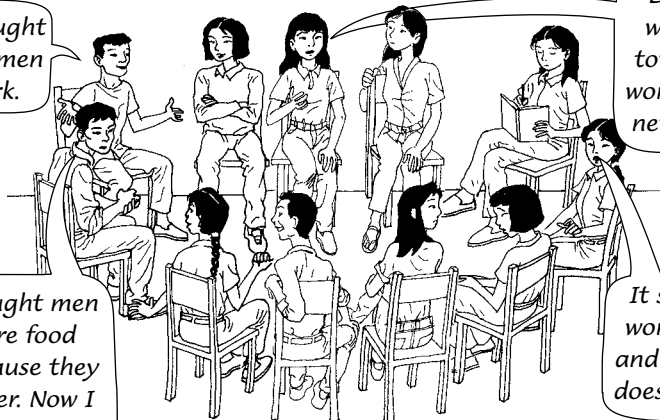
Activity

A day in the life *(continued)*

- 4 Discuss making the lists. You can ask if people are surprised by any part of the lists or any part of making the lists. Do they think the women did a good job of listing the men's activities? Did the men do a good job of listing the women's activities?
- 5 Discuss what is on the lists. What is different about the kinds of activities women and men do? Why do women and men do different kinds of activities? Which activities on the lists of men's work could women do just as well? Which activities on the lists of women's work could men do just as well? Why could they or could they not?
- 6 Discuss other differences between women and men that are related to each gender's work. For example, ask which group has more leisure time to spend as they like. Which group has a larger workload? Do people think these differences are justified? Why or why not?

You can also ask about women or men who do some of the work on the other gender's list. Why do those people do work usually expected of the other gender? Are they more or less respected for doing that work?
- 7 To end the activity, ask the group if they would like to change any expectations about men's and women's daily activities and workloads. Ask them to explain how such changes would benefit women and men. What challenges would there be? Discuss what each person can do to make those changes happen, what others can do, and how the group can help the whole community change.

I never thought of what women do as work.



Even though I work all day in town, I still have work at home and never get to rest.

I always thought men needed more food and rest because they worked harder. Now I think women work hard but eat and rest less.

It seems women work more hours and rest less. That doesn't sound fair!

Red Thread unites women for health and rights in Guyana

People in Guyana, South America, belong to different ethnic groups with different customs and traditions. One group is mostly descended from Africans brought there as slaves, another from Indian immigrants, and a third group is mostly native to Guyana. For many years these different ethnic groups were deeply at odds, and the women did not feel they had much in common. An organization called Red Thread wanted to find a way to unite the women and work together to raise the status of all Guyanese women. Red Thread created a survey to learn how women spend their time. Red Thread members visited women all over the country and used the survey to ask them what they did all day. They discovered that most women's days were similar: they rose early, collected water or fuel, cooked, fed their families, cleaned, tended a small garden, had a paid job, washed clothes, looked after children, and did various other things. Almost all the women worked 15 to 16 hours each day. Red Thread showed the results of the survey to the women and asked, "Why are we dividing ourselves? We are all doing the same work." This project was a great unifier. Red Thread grew into a strong, multi-ethnic women's group, working in many ways to promote women's rights, including earning money and ending gender-based violence.



Gender roles change over time

Gender roles often assign a lower status to women, which means less access to health care, less control over your own body, more hours of work, and less decision-making power. For communities to improve women's health, they need to change gender roles, especially those that make women vulnerable to men. This might seem very hard to do, but less hard when we see that gender is not biological — that what we think of as masculine or feminine comes from our ideas about men and women, not from nature. It also helps to remember that gender roles have changed over time in every part of the world. Discussing women's lives in the past compared to the present can help people see that gender roles do change and how these changes might improve women's health.

Activity

The way we were

In this “fishbowl” activity, older women sit in an inner circle and talk about what their mothers’ lives were like. The younger women sit in the outer circle and listen, and then ask questions later. After their questions are answered, the groups switch places so that the younger women can share some of their thoughts about how things seem to have changed, while the older people listen.

- 1 To prepare the older women, ask them to speak about the things they learned from their mothers about femininity and being a woman. Also, how are their lives different from their mothers’ lives? What changed to make their lives as women different? Why did the changes happen?

Ask if there were ways in which they, their friends, or their mothers rebelled against the community’s expectations for women? How have some women broken with traditional gender roles? What happened to them?

You might also ask them to tell the younger women about changes in customs and rules for friendships and romances between boys and girls. How have rules changed for courtship, sexual relationships, and getting married? What did women do in the past to care for their health?

- 2 When the young women have their turn in the fishbowl, ask them to begin by telling the group what they like about being a woman and what they think is unfair about being a woman. How do they think their ideas about being a woman are different from their grandmothers’ ideas? The ideas of others in their community?

Ask them to talk about their goals for the future. Who are some women they admire? Why? What do they hope for in a romantic partner or husband? What do they picture as a healthy life for themselves in the future?

- 3 To end, ask the whole group what this activity shows us about gender and how it changes over time, and how we can help change it in our lifetime.

I work with a girls’ group that did not want to meet with a group of elders. Instead, each girl interviewed her grandmother or another older woman she knew. The girls could share what they learned in any way they wanted. Some wrote poems, others wrote up their interview like a magazine article, and a few used dramas and played the role of their grandmothers.



Gender, power, and health

One of the traditional qualities of masculinity is being powerful, and men usually hold the most powerful positions in a community. For example, community leaders and government officials are more often men than women. Men are often expected to make decisions without consulting women or considering how women will be affected. In a family, the man is usually expected to be the head of the household and to decide how money is earned and spent. In a couple, the man often expects to control when and how he and his partner have sex or use family planning. These power inequities are at the root of many health problems that are common among women.

Almost everyone has some power. The problem is how power is distributed and used. Discussing different kinds of power can help people see how power can be used in healthy or harmful ways.

Power over is the most harmful kind of power. People usually think of this kind of power as using threats, manipulation, violence, or punishments to force a person or a group of people to do something they do not choose.

More powerful people often use rules, customs, and laws to preserve their power and to control other people and their actions. Less powerful people, such as women, are usually excluded from making or enforcing most of the rules, customs, and laws that govern their lives, including full access to health care. Using power in these ways is sometimes called oppression.

This kind of power can be so strong, and continue for so long, that a person or group with less power accepts the inequity as “normal.” When this happens, they may not believe they have any choice or any possibility of making changes, and may pass this point of view on to others.

Get back to work. The lunch break is over!



It's not fair. They get to go to school and I have to stay home and work.





Power from within is the ability to act on feelings and ideas. This kind of power enables people to imagine a goal and to believe that reaching the goal is possible. Girls and women all over the world show this kind of power when they pursue education despite obstacles, keep their families together in difficult circumstances, and find ways to protect their health and the health of their families and communities.

Power with is gained by uniting with others in community, solidarity, and cooperation. Collective power strengthens people's ability to take action for changes that bring dignity, justice, and health for all to the whole community.

To further explore different kinds of power, see the activity *More powerful vs. less powerful* (page 154).



Explore the connection: Gender roles, power, and health

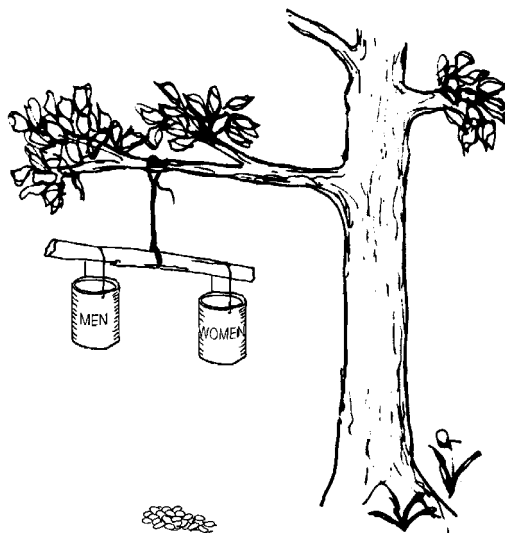
The activities on the next 4 pages can help the group explore gender expectations, unequal power relationships, and how both impact women's health. They can be done together or separately to help explore the connections among gender roles, power, and health. You can also adapt these activities to look at a specific issue of women's health, such as safe birth, and then discuss how gender roles and power affect that issue.

Activity

The balance of burdens

This activity can help a group explore how differences in power and different expectations between women and men cause unequal burdens that affect women's health. You can do this with a group of women and girls only, or include supportive men.

To prepare: Set up a balance with 2 cans, some string, and a stick. One can is for women's burdens and the other for men's. Have some equal-sized beans or stones to put in the cans. Also have some cards or pieces of paper (a regular sheet of paper cut in half works well).



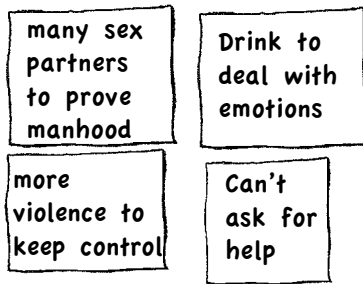
- 1 Tell the story of Vanna's unsafe pregnancies (page 220) or Emma's story of Sex and the unhappy bride (page 95) to help people think about how gender inequities affect women's health.
- 2 Ask the group to think about the story and also about their own lives and experiences. Ask them to think about how gender expectations sometimes do not allow women or men to behave in ways that protect women's health. These limitations for men and women can be seen as burdens imposed by gender expectations.
- 3 Ask different people in the group to give examples of "burdens" — gender roles or expectations that impact women's health. As each person mentions a burden, ask her to add a bean to the women's or men's side of the balance, depending on who has the burden. Add extra beans to reflect examples where women's health is most affected. If a burden is even more dangerous for a young woman, an immigrant, or a minority group, put extra beans in the can too.

Write each burden on a card or piece of paper and tape it on a wall, with women's on one side and men's on another. Note that many of women's burdens have to do with the lack of power or access to money and resources.

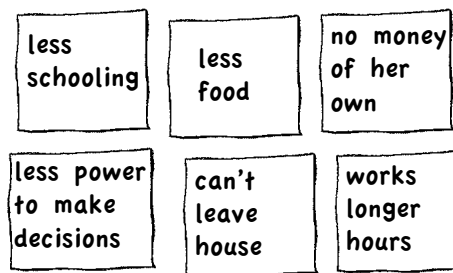
Activity

The balance of burdens *(continued)*

Men



Women



- 4 Ask the group to look at the balance and which side has the most burdens. Explain that by discussing these inequalities, you are not trying to blame men but to better understand how gender expectations can harm the health of both women and men. When people are not limited by gender burdens, everyone's lives and health are better.

You may want to conclude with a reflection about how to create a better balance between men and women. The domino game that follows is a good way to continue to explore the connections between gender roles, women's status, and women's health.

A dominoes game to explore gender inequality and women's health

"The balance of burdens" activity helps a group examine many of the causes of women's unequal access to power and health, such as less schooling and more work. In the next activity, you can see the effect of these burdens on women's health. This activity follows the same rules as a game of dominoes, except that instead of dots, each side of a domino has a cause or effect that relates to women's health. The causes come from women's low status or gender expectations. The effects are situations leading to health problems. The group leader's job is to make this activity as exciting and fun as a game of dominoes while helping people have a serious conversation about how women's low status can cause serious health problems, even death. The goal is to have a discussion, not a test.



I lead a women's group. During one meeting, we talked about how women experience lower status in the community. Then I used all of the women's ideas as the causes in my dominoes game. Later, the women invited their husbands to a meeting and we played the game!

Activity

The dominoes game

To make the dominoes:

Make 15 to 20 large rectangular pieces of colored paper or cardboard (8 ½" x 14" works well). These will be your dominoes.

One end of each domino will have a cause. If you did "The balance of burdens" activity on pages 54 to 55, you may already have made cards or papers for the cause ends of the dominoes. Tape or glue the cause papers onto one end of each of your dominoes. Make copies of the causes if you don't have enough to put a different one on each of the dominoes.

The other end of each domino should have a woman's health problem or effect, which you can fill in ahead of time or create as a first step in the activity. Use different colored ink or paper for the health problem end of the domino.

You can repeat causes and effects on the dominoes. Remember, the cause on one end does not need to match the health problem on the other end of the same domino. Mix them up!



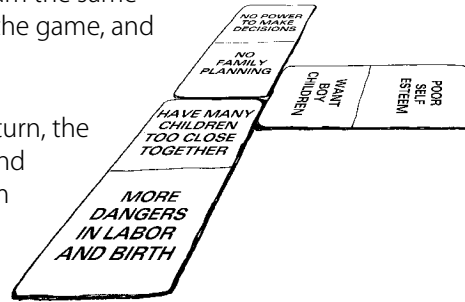
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Introduce the activity: Ask the group to brainstorm health problems that women face. As people name different health problems that affect women, write them onto cards or pieces of paper that will fit the other ends of the dominoes. Tape the health problems onto the dominoes to prepare them for the game.

Activity

The dominoes game (continued)

- 2 Put people into teams of 4 or 5. Give each team the same number of dominoes. Keep one out to start the game, and lay it on the ground or tape it to the wall.
- 3 Each team takes a turn. After the first team's turn, the next team needs to look at their dominoes and decide if they have a cause or health problem that would relate to the domino already laid out. Remember, for many causes there will be more than one possible health problem, and some health problems may relate to another health problem.



The first team lays down its chosen domino. The team must explain the connection that they see. If everyone agrees with them, the domino stays. If some disagree, let people talk about it, and if there is still disagreement, the team loses a turn.

If a team has no domino that relates to any of the causes and effects on the dominoes that are already laid out, then they lose their turn.

The first team to use up all of their dominoes wins.

Think about it!
 “No power to make decisions” is the cause that can match any of these harmful effects.



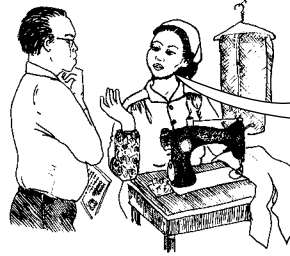
- 4 To conclude, ask the group to discuss the ways in which gender roles and women's lack of power relate to health problems that women face.



You can also use a Problem Tree to look at how harmful gender roles are the cause of many women's health problems. I adapted the one from Chapter 7: Protecting Women's Health with Family Planning.

Communication is powerful

Common qualities thought to be feminine are being passive and obedient. Women and girls are not expected to challenge or contradict what men say. Their opinions are often ignored, and women may be criticized, isolated, or punished for speaking out, or for simply saying what they need or desire. Changing this can take a lot of courage, but having a voice and making it heard is one way of having power.



I went to the bathroom because I needed to go. You know I always complete the quota, so I don't think you have the right to cut my pay because I went to the bathroom.

Study these 3 examples of communication and discuss their advantages and disadvantages.

A man does not allow his wife to go to community meetings. Other women have invited her to go with them, but she is afraid to tell her husband that she would like to join them.



Weak or passive communication: a woman gives in to what another person wants, puts others first in ways that hurt her, stays silent when something bothers her, apologizes a lot, cries a lot, hides her feelings, does not act to defend her rights. She tells the other women she is not interested, and she spends the rest of the night sulking towards her husband.



Fighting or aggressive communication: a woman does what she wants with little or no thought for others, makes threats or demands, avoids listening to others, becomes angry quickly when others disagree with her, shouts, shames or judges others. She is angry with the women and criticizes them for being involved in things that don't concern them. And she is angry with her husband, because he goes to meetings while she stays home.



Strong or assertive communication: a woman respects herself and others, stands up for her rights, listens and talks calmly, tells others her thoughts, needs and feelings clearly, says "no" without feeling guilty, asks for help when she needs it, shows confidence in the way she looks and speaks. She explains to her husband why she is interested in the meetings and tells him, "The group meets once every 2 weeks and I would really like to attend. I can still meet all my responsibilities at home. Can we talk about how we can make this work?"

You can practice using assertive communication in role plays about negotiating sex. See *Communicating for healthier relationships* (page 97).

Clearer communication with “I” statements

How can we communicate our feelings, opinions, and desires strongly, but in a way that also shows respect and consideration for another person? Try using “I” statements.

An “I” statement is a way to clearly say your point of view without blaming, judging, or threatening the other person. You say how a situation is affecting you, how you feel about it, and what you would like to see happen.

Learning to use “I” statements may feel strange at first. It is a very powerful way of speaking. But once people try it in their relationships and become more comfortable with it, they will see how well it works.

Activity

How to make an “I” statement

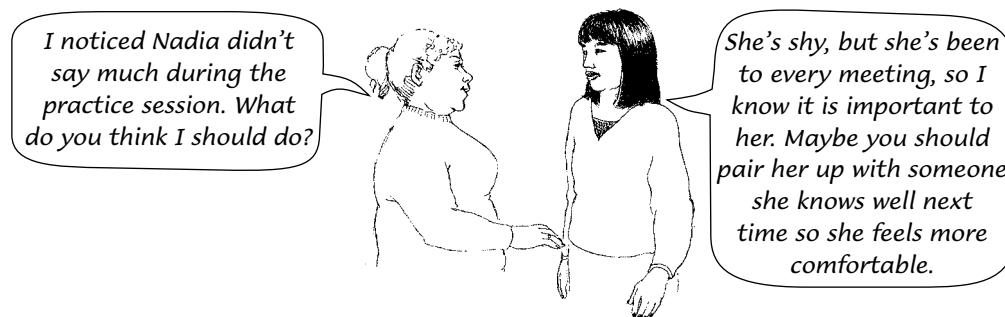
- 1 First, say what is bothering you and how it makes you feel. You can say more about what is bothering you and why, but only if you can say it in a way that does not blame or insult the person.
- 2 Then say what you would like. It is important not to make this a demand or requirement. If you do, the request will feel too aggressive.
- 3 Then ask how the other person feels about what you have said or requested.

When you come home late from the bar, I am sad because I would like to spend time with you. And I worry about the money I need for food for the children. I would like to discuss how you and I can both get what we need. Would this be OK with you?



Support the trainer

Supporting women to be good communicators means being a good communicator (and listener!) yourself. Everyone doing this work needs help. Be prepared before starting an activity. Practice or talk it through with someone else so that you can be as relaxed as possible when you are leading an activity. Make sure you have another person who can listen to you reflect on the activity after it is over. Keep in mind that your own relationship to gender roles might come up in the course of doing these activities.



Men working for gender equality

Women have been and will be the driving force towards gender equality. It is hard for some men to accept the idea of sharing power and privileges equally with women. Many men resist any change in gender roles that gives women more control over their own lives. But more and more men accept and support changes that raise women's status, because they understand how gender equality improves the quality of life for all.

Men are often inspired to work for gender equality, because they see it as an important part of other struggles for justice, such as control over land and resources, access to education and health care, and freedom from violence.

Activities such as A day in the life (pages 48 to 49) and Gender boxes (pages 44 to 45) can help men understand and sympathize with the hardships women suffer because of gender inequality. Men may already be thinking about ways that changing gender expectations could benefit both men and women.

Young men unite against machismo in Ecuador

In Ecuador, South America, acting “macho” — sexually dominant and aggressive — at home and in public is the expected way for a man to show his masculinity. But attitudes about that kind of dominant masculinity, called machismo, are changing, thanks to a growing generation of young men, including a group organized as the Cascos Rosa (Pink Helmets). Wearing pink T-shirts, these young men are working to promote new ways of behaving that call for an end to violence against women, gender inequality, and sexual exploitation.



Cascos Rosa hosts a youth radio program that openly and creatively discusses sexuality, gender-based violence, and other topics.

Cascos Rosa was first started in 2010 by a small group of young men who received awareness-raising training from the Ecuadorian chapter of Citizens’ Action for Democracy and Development. They learned about the power men have over women that prevents women from enjoying the rights and freedoms they are entitled to, about violence against women, and about different ways to express masculinity.

Since then, Cascos Rosa has grown and now includes young women. They give talks and present awareness-raising activities in schools, community centers, and places where young people gather, such as music festivals. They understand that change does not happen quickly. They want to get people thinking about possible changes in their personal lives so they can move toward a society based on equality, human rights, and fairness.

Founding member Damián Valencia describes what has happened in his own home since he got involved. “Everything has changed,” he says, “especially my father. He never used to do anything, and now he washes the dishes and sometimes does the ironing. This has made my mother happier and calmer because her burden is lighter.” Many young people say their families had experiences like that of Damián’s family. Their parents’ relationships improved and there was less violence in their homes — everyone benefited.

HASIK: The gender seminar for men

A group in the Philippines called HASIK (Harnessing Self-reliant Initiatives and Knowledge) developed a 3-day gender awareness seminar for men. In their work, HASIK saw that people (and organizations and communities) were most likely to change when they deeply understood the problems women face from gender inequality, developed strong feelings about the issue, and saw ways to change.

Men do not always see how gender inequality harms everyone, and especially how much women suffer because of it. HASIK knew success depended on helping men see this suffering and the role men play in it, without shaming them for their lack of awareness.

If you want men to change, you must engage them through their minds, their bodies, and their hearts.



To help men feel comfortable at first, the facilitators allow them to joke, talk, and share their opinions about women without being corrected or interrupted. They also discuss men's and women's roles (see Gender boxes, page 44). Because the men do not feel judged or criticized, they are fairly open and relaxed.

Next, the men watch a live dramatic presentation, designed to help them empathize with women's hardships. "Hearing Women's Voices, Feeling Women's Pain" combines songs about women's lives and relationships with pictures, videos, personal stories, and facts, such as how many women are treated unfairly at work, experience violence, and are hurt in other ways by their low status. Parts of the presentation invite men to consider how their own actions and attitudes might play a part in the problem. Many of the participants are deeply upset or shocked by this new information, and the discussion becomes more serious.

HASIK facilitators noticed that at this point many men see the problems women face more deeply, but some still do not fully understand or care about gender inequality. To push the group's understanding in a fun way, HASIK created a competitive team activity. Each team tries to best explain the causes of gender inequality. To score, men must use convincing arguments to persuade each other. In this process, more men are convinced. For a similar activity, see Taking a Stand (page 261).

With more awareness, compassion, and concern about the women in their lives, men then consider how things could be different. Using an activity called Image Theater, men look at everyday moments of unfairness or despair for women and work on how to transform them. This helps men think about how to make changes in their own lives, relationships, and community. Instructions for Image Theater are on the next page.

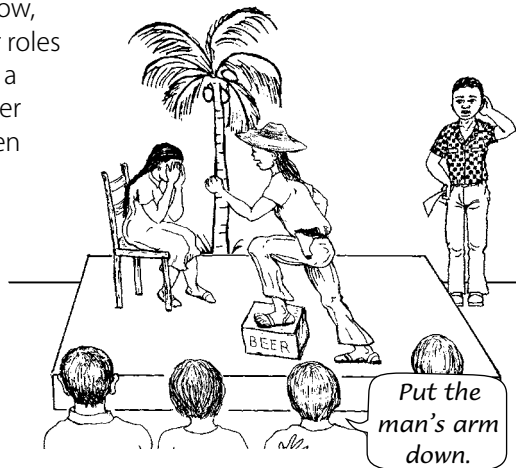
The seminar ends with a ritual. In a quiet space, the men spend 15 minutes thinking about how the gender training will affect them personally. Then each man speaks about a way he commits to respect fairness in his relationships with 1 or 2 women in his family or community. After 3 days of listening, arguing, and various creative activities asking them to think in new ways, this reflection often leads to personal transformation that turns men into dedicated activists in the struggle to improve the lives, health, and rights of women in their communities.

Activity

Image theater

In this activity, there are 3 different groups: statues, sculptors, and audience. The statues take still poses, showing roles or actions that were discussed in the free association activity. Statues show how they feel with body language. The sculptors may move the statues, but cannot speak to them. The audience analyzes what is going on and suggests how sculptors can change the scene. Props and costumes are useful.

- 1 Select several people to be the sculptors or statues. Help them choose a scene to show, with people acting out common gender roles the group has already discussed, such as a wife cooking and watching children as her husband drinks a beer, or 2 young women being harassed by older men on the street, or a man yelling at his girlfriend with his hand raised to strike her.
- 2 Ask the audience what they see in the scenes, and then allow the sculptors to change the bodies of the people to reflect a more positive outcome or interaction. Encourage the audience to provide more feedback by asking them what changed and what could be further improved, and what this would look like. The audience may then step in and improve the scene even more.
- 3 At the end of these 2 rounds, discuss the theater. How did the scene change? Was there anything acted out that reminded them of their own lives? If so, did the activity change how they think about their own experience? What could a man do to change his actions if he was in a similar situation as that scene?



Raising boys and girls as equals

Children start learning gender expectations as soon as their parents and other adults know if the baby will be a boy or a girl. These gender roles often lead to an unequal access to resources and decision-making power that harms women's health. One way to make sure girls and boys will be equally valued is to raise children with the same expectations, rights, and responsibilities.

Changing how we pass on ideas about gender

There are many ways a group of parents, teachers, and other adults can work with children to help all of them develop their full capabilities equally, free of harmful gender expectations. Parents can support each other by meeting regularly to talk about how gender expectations affect the ways they are raising their children.

Adults can teach girls and boys to respect each other, share things fairly, and cooperate on tasks together. Boys should not to be shamed for showing emotions, especially feelings of fear or sadness. Adults can help boys name and express their feelings, and also help girls say what they think and feel without fear of rejection or ridicule.

Both boys and girls can learn to do all kinds of chores and share the same responsibilities, such as cooking, cleaning, caring for younger brothers and sisters, tending crops and animals, and using tools and machines.

A parents' group can organize to make sure that girls and boys have the same opportunities at school, such as playing sports or taking certain classes. Adults can also help children create puppet shows or plays that use new stories or change traditional ones so they do not reinforce gender roles. (An example would be a story about a girl who rescues a boy from a monster instead of the boy rescuing the girl.)

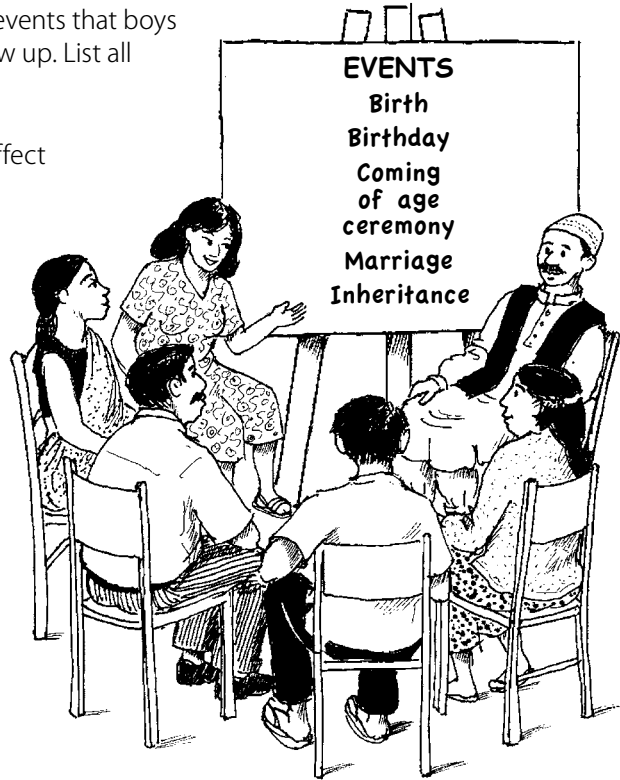


It is also important to talk with children about the stories and magazines they read, the songs they listen to, and the TV shows, movies, and videos they watch, and help them question harmful gender roles when they are promoted in these media.

Activity

Changing the rules

- 1 Ask people to name important events that boys and girls experience as they grow up. List all the ideas.
- 2 Ask how gender expectations affect traditional events, for example:
 - How is the birth of a boy received differently from the birth of a girl?
 - How are expectations about marriage different for a young man and a young woman?
 - Are these differences necessary or important? Why? What benefits are there to having different traditions for girls and boys? What benefits might there be in making traditions more similar?
 - When growing up (or raising your child), how did the differences make you feel?
- 3 Divide into small groups and ask each group to pick an event. For each event, ask the groups to think of some ways they could show that girls and boys are equally valued.
- 4 Bring the groups back together and ask people to present their ideas.
- 5 To end the activity, plan how to bring some of the ideas to the community.



We made a drama for our village meeting about greeting the births of our daughters just as we do the births of our sons. We paid the midwife the same as if a boy had been born, held a ritual, and had a big party!

Mentoring can play an important role in building a person's self-esteem. The caring attention of an older person has helped many girls change their own expectations about who they are and what might be possible for them. Similarly, boys can benefit from mentoring to learn to take the feelings of and possibilities for girls more seriously. The older person might be a teacher who sees certain strengths in a girl and encourages her to develop them. Or the person might be an auntie who looks out for young people, helping them to see their capabilities and work toward goals.

Girls become leaders

The Girl Child Network was started by a teacher in Zimbabwe, herself a survivor of rape as a child. She and the other founding members, some of them survivors of child abuse who are now staff members of this thriving organization, developed an approach to healing and support for girls that focuses on building self-esteem and leadership. Their approach results in well-spoken and capable young women who know their rights and can speak for the rights of girls. They have clear goals for themselves and plans for how to achieve them. They also know how to protect themselves when someone tries to abuse them, and they are ready and able to give support to girls who feel hopeless or helpless.

An important activity of the Girl Child Network is to respond to individual cases of abuse, providing girls a way out of harmful situations, working together with police and social service organizations, and raising awareness in families and communities about the rights of girls.

The key to helping girls become leaders rather than victims is through Girls' Empowerment Clubs, generally based in schools. Girls work together, with the support of sensitive adult mentors, on activities to build their skills and confidence. They discuss their hopes and dreams as well as their experiences of abuse and disempowerment. They study and debate aspects of gender equality and human rights, and learn about everything from reproductive health to career opportunities. They organize self-help projects, engage in community mobilization using art, songs, dance and drama, and learn to name and shame rapists rather than feeling shame themselves.




Activity

Reaching your dreams

This activity can help a group of adolescent girls reflect on their personal goals and on life skills they will need. Reflecting on dreams and personal goals motivates girls and gives them direction. When families, teachers, and communities encourage girls to set personal goals and give them the support they need, change becomes possible. If a girl attends school, for example, her chances of getting a job or pursuing a career are much greater. She will also be better prepared to make decisions that protect her health as a woman.

- 1 Ask everyone to take a few minutes to reflect on their goals for themselves. You can give each girl a piece of paper and a pen or pencil to write down her personal goals or draw pictures that show them.
- 2 On a large piece of paper or board, write questions that will help the girls explore their goals. Here are some sample questions you might use:
 - What do you know about yourself? Consider your values, skills, interests, responsibilities, strengths, and weaknesses.
 - What are your goals right now? What are your long-term life goals? For example: education and training, career and work, travel, personal and family goals.
 - Who can help you reach your goals? What steps do you need to take? What might get in your way? How can you overcome setbacks and doubts?
- 3 Form small groups and make sure everyone can see the questions. Ask the groups to take about 10 minutes to discuss each question, making sure everyone in each small group has a chance to speak.
- 4 When the groups have finished, gather everyone together. Ask each group to share one or two points that they discussed with each question. Then encourage each girl to identify one of her goals and some skills she will need to achieve it.



I like science. I want to study hydrology or geology – the sciences about water and the earth – so I can help save our resources.

I don't like to study, but I get along very well with people. I would like to be part of a cooperative business that makes and sells clothes.

Gender in the media

TV shows, movies, music videos, and advertisements all use gender roles in their stories and to sell things. By looking at the hidden — or not so hidden — messages in advertisements, we can see how they promote ideas about gender, many of which are not healthy for men or women.

Activity

The world of ads — sexy women and manly men

This activity lets people have fun and be artistic. To prepare, you will need several magazines or newspapers with images of women and men. These may be glamor or fashion magazines, men's magazines, or any type of magazine with advertising pages. You will also need scissors, glue or tape, and pencils or markers.

- 1 Give people time to look through the magazines. Ask them to pay attention to ads that have women in them. Give people a chance to share their reactions.
- 2 Discuss the messages the ads use to sell their products. Make a list of the ideas. To help people consider the messages in an advertisement, ask what the ad wants people to think about women or men. Which ideas about how women and men should behave or think does the ad exploit or make attractive? Which ideas does it make seem unattractive or less worthy? How might the ad make women or men feel bad about themselves?

You might also discuss other messages that influence ideas about people's worth or status. For example, what do ads tell us about poor people, rich people, and people of different social groups and body types?

Ask people if they think any of the ads lie. Which ones? Why?

Finally, ask people to think about how the ads influence ideas about health. Do they try to make people buy or do things that are not healthy?

Why do all the models in ads have white skin and smooth hair? Nobody in my community looks like them.



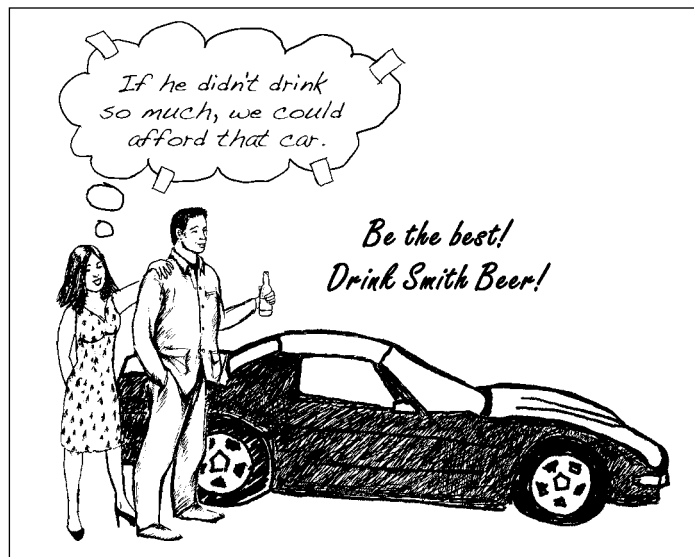
Activity **The world of ads — sexy women and manly men** *(continued)*

If your goal is to help women or young people see how messages about sexuality, beauty standards, or idealized women might be unhealthy for them, you may want to focus on body image and look at what the ads suggest about health and the “ideal body” — looking at weight, height, age, skin color, and other features.

- 3** Now it’s time to get creative. There are many different projects a group can do with these ads. For example, transform ads by making their “hidden message” visible. Or copy an ad with an obvious negative message about women and change it in a way that makes fun of the advertisement itself. This is called “adbusting.” You can also have a contest to make a positive poster or advertisement that “sells” women’s strengths and possibilities, or shows new ways men and women can behave.

Adbusting uses art or writing to change what an ad says. It may either expose an ugly truth about the message or product, or replace the message with a new idea. Too often, the art that most people see is the advertisements on posters, billboards and magazines. Messages to sell things often spread false or harmful ideas, while we struggle to make our voices heard. One popular way to fight these harmful images is to change them. This can attract a lot of attention and make people think.

Adbusting may make fun of the product or disturb the way viewers see an ad by making a more serious point. When an ad tries to make the viewer feel a certain way, an adbuster may change it so that the viewer feels the opposite way. It can be as simple as taping a “thought bubble” on a magazine ad, and then taking a photo of it to post online or to share with others.



Using laws for gender justice

The power imbalances that women experience in their families and communities are not only personal or cultural. Government policies and laws support and enforce gender inequality. For example, many communities have laws that deny women the right to choose whom to marry, the right to divorce, the right to own or inherit property, or the right to make contracts or business arrangements. Some women do not even have the right to decide to get or refuse medical treatment. (See *Make judicial systems work to stop violence*, page 171, and *Appendix A: Advocate for Women's Rights Using International Law*, page 300.)



You can begin a discussion about how laws can be used for gender justice by thinking about current laws that do not promote equality. For example, are women paid as much as men for the same kind of work? Are there laws that prevent young women from seeking medical care?

Challenging such laws, introducing new legislation, and raising awareness about how laws and policies can instead promote greater equality is sometimes called gender justice. Many of these efforts build upon a series of international agreements that recognize the equal rights of women.

International agreements on equal rights for women and men

When the United Nations started in 1945, it created a charter that called for “equal rights for men and women.” At the time the charter was written, only 30 of the 51 participating countries had laws that allowed women the same voting rights as men. Although the UN charter called for equal gender rights, it took several decades of international organizing for this issue to be addressed. Finally in 1975 women from almost every country in the world met together in Mexico City to discuss women’s rights and propose changes to unfair laws and customs based on gender expectations. This first meeting called for the elimination of gender discrimination and for women’s inclusion in plans for development. Later meetings have created more specific international standards, such as providing universal access to family planning, equal treatment of girl children, and increased participation of women in governments worldwide.

The governments of most countries agreed in principle to the women’s proposals, but local women’s groups, health promoters, and their allies still have to organize and struggle to get rid of harmful laws, put just laws in their place, and change people’s thinking about gender roles and human rights. There is still much work to be done!

The next 2 stories show how groups have organized for just laws in 2 African countries.

Protecting the rights of widows to inherit

In Kenya, Africa, when a woman's husband dies, his family will often claim the widow's land and home as theirs, even if the husband left the property to his wife. GROOTS (Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood) works to educate communities about the inheritance rights of women. GROOTS also organizes "watchdog" groups made up of community members who guard against grabbing property from recently widowed women and their children.

GROOTS first started by organizing community-based listening groups, where participants heard recordings of women telling how all their possessions were taken from them when their husbands died, and how much they had suffered. The listening groups grew and became discussion groups that included community leaders and elders. By sharing stories and information about the law, everyone learned about women's legal rights to inheritance and property, why property grabbing happens, and how it forces many women and children into poverty. Dialogues with local chiefs and other traditional leaders helped them understand how their support for these widows and for the watchdog groups could prevent this from happening. Some community members have also been trained as paralegal advisors who can inform individual women about their legal rights.

In a growing number of communities, the police, traditional leaders, and the community have agreed to work together to watch out for the rights of women who become widowed.



A campaign to end child marriage in Malawi

In Malawi, the law says a woman can be married with her parents' permission between the ages of 15 and 18, but there is no law prohibiting marriage at younger ages. Almost half of all women in Malawi marry before age 18. In rural areas, girls as young as 12 are sometimes married, and marrying at age 15 is common. Most of these young women stop going to school and soon get pregnant. But childbirth at such young ages is dangerous for both the girls and their babies. More than half the babies born to these child brides are likely to die, and very young women are more likely to suffer health problems such as obstetric fistula (see page 231). Their situation is made worse by lack of education and workplace or homemaking skills. After becoming mothers, they are often divorced quickly, and many end up doing sex work to support themselves.

In 2010, the Girls Empowerment Network (GENET) started a campaign to change the law and make 18 the legal age of marriage. Since information about the effects of child marriage on women's health had not convinced lawmakers, GENET decided to let lawmakers — and all Malawians — hear what young women themselves had to say about the matter. GENET organized a writing contest for girls. They received 1,750 essays from girls as young as 9 and as old as 17. They selected 72 of those girls to participate in organized focus group discussions using questions like these:

"What do you feel about child marriage?"

"What do you think is the right age for a girl to get married?"

"What is your ideal or dream husband?"

"Do educated girls make bad wives?"

"Would you like to have the same marriage as your parents?"



Then, 36 of those girls participated in a photo workshop. They photographed each other and wrote new essays answering the questions they had discussed in the focus groups. Their essays and photographs have now been made into a book, titled *I Will Marry When I Want To!!* GENET distributed the book to show lawmakers and community leaders that Malawian girls fully support changing the marriage age to 18 and are ready to enforce it in their own lives.



There are as many opinions on life, love, and marriage as there are girls, but we did not get a single reaction supporting legal marriage under age 18.

Change takes courage and time

When people have thought about some of the ways gender roles can be unfair and harmful to both women and men, they can begin to think about changes they might choose to work for. For most people, this means working to change some of their own attitudes and expectations, as well as working to change customs, conditions, and laws in their communities.

Gender inequality is the root cause of most of the health problems presented in the rest of the chapters in this book. The activities and stories in each chapter show many different ways of working for gender equality and women's health.