Chapter Activities

# Chapter 9: Gender Stratification: She/He—Who Goes First?

## What Is Feminism?

**Objective:** To show students that feminist ideals are often poorly understood, in part because they are not universal.

**Directions:** Instruct each student to quietly write a response for 2–4 minutes to the questions “What is feminism?” and “What do feminists believe?” Then put students in small groups and have them share their definitions with one another and discuss the similarities and differences. Groups should report their findings to the entire classroom.

## What Is Masculine? What Is Feminine?

**Objective:** Students will learn more about the socially constructed nature of masculinity and femininity.

**Directions:** On the board, make two columns. Label one “masculine” and another “feminine.” As a group, list items that should fall under each category. These can include physical items or character traits. After the list making is complete, begin asking students about each of the items on this list in turn. Is each trait exclusively masculine/feminine? Is it only considered masculine or feminine for a certain subsection of the population? Is masculinity/femininity a continuum, or are they mutually exclusive categories? Since they are endpoints on a continuum, draw the continuum and place the items from the original list on the continuum.

## What Is Sexy?

**Objective:** To help students learn that gender, sex, and sexuality are not readily apparent and are independent.

**Directions:** Before class, prepare a collection of 5–10 photographs as a PowerPoint or as overheads. These should include very feminine-appearing drag queens or transgendered persons, masculine-looking biological women, very masculine-appearing drag kings or transgendered persons, and feminine-looking biological men. Break the students into groups and ask them to rate each person pictured based on how attractive the person is and how sexy the person is. They should explain their answers. Then as a whole class, go through the pictures one at a time and write the group rankings on the board. Finally, reveal to the entire class the true sex, gender, and sexual orientation (if known) of the individuals pictured. Use students’ surprise to begin a discussion of how the three concepts differ, are all socially constructed, and are not readily apparent.

## How Did You Become Gendered?

**Objective:** To help students understand that gender is the result of socialization, not biology.

**Directions:** Either as a paper or as an in-class discussion, have students answer the following questions:

1. What is gender? How does it differ from sex?
2. Which of your personality traits, behaviors, and beliefs do you consider “masculine?”
   1. How did you learn that those are considered masculine characteristics?
3. Which of your personality traits, behaviors, and beliefs do you consider “feminine?”
   1. How did you learn that those are considered feminine characteristics?
4. Of those traits/beliefs/behaviors, which were you born with?
5. Of those traits/beliefs/behaviors, which did you learn? How did you learn them?

## Gender Norm Violation

**Objective:** Students will learn the process of sanctioning those who do not conform to gender norms and how those sanctions vary based on the degree of the violation.

**Directions:** Students should be placed in groups of three. One student will be the gender violator and the other two will act as observers. As a group, students should determine which gendered norm to violate (e.g., female students could walk with a “swagger” or sit on the bus in such a way as to take up more than half of the seat; male students could carry a purse or wear feminine earrings/clothing). Students should find a location on campus or in the community to practice the violation.

The students who are acting as observers should be as unobtrusive as possible. At the end of the exercise, students who violated the norm should present or write about their experiences as norm violators, and observers should present or write about the different forms of sanctions that they saw others giving the violator.

As a class, students should rank the severity of the different violations (and discuss what makes specific violations more or less severe). Finally, students should determine if there is a relationship between the severity of the violation and the types of sanctions received.

## Stereotypes

**Objective:** To show students how early gender stereotypes are formed and their impact.

**Directions:** Have students go online to websites or on social media to look for examples of gender stereotypes. These can be products geared toward a particular gender or people speaking about a particular gender on social media. Present to the class the best examples submitted and then discuss with the class the following:

1. How prevalent do you think these gendered thoughts are in our society?
2. What impact do these examples have on members of our society?

## Gender Messages in Television Shows

**Objective**: Students will learn the significance of gender messages presented in various television shows.

**Directions**: Have the students, over the course of a week, watch a variety of television shows. Have them watch one crime-themed show, one comedy, and one cartoon. As they watch each show, have them write down their observations in terms of how the males and females are dressed, how they are speaking, and how they are behaving. Then break the students into groups of four and have them discuss their findings with their small group. Have a designated student present the findings of their group to the class.

## Femininity and Masculinity

**Objective**: This activity will demonstrate how feminine and masculine traits are possessed by both men and women.

**Directions**: Have the students who identify as male list any “feminine” traits they possess and have students who identify as female list any “masculine” traits they possess. You can also have students include activities they enjoy that are thought of as something that men or women do. Read the lists out loud to the class. Start with masculine traits that women possess and then feminine traits that men in the class possess. In the author’s experience this activity elicits a lot of laughter among the students. The instructor can then ask students about why they find these lists funny. Is it because we are uncomfortable with people who are not following gender norms or because it demonstrates how “silly” the idea is that certain traits are strictly male or female?