Creating Healthier Masculinities

Time Required: 75 minutes

Learning Objectives:

- Unpacking stereotypical expectations on masculinity and how they enable different types of violence including child sexual exploitation and sex trafficking
- Discussing alternatives to unhealthy expectations in masculinity and assessing their impact
- Witnessing Catholic social teaching by promoting equality democracy and solidarity for a just peaceful and compassionate society

Notes for Educators:

This lesson plan focuses entirely on social norms associated with masculinity. It can be done either with an exclusively male-identifying youth as well as with students of all genders. If sessions are divided by gender identity, non-binary and trans students should be given the opportunity to join the session that is the most affirming for them.

Please note that throughout this lesson plan, it's important to use a strength based-lens in which conversations are not framed as a critique on masculinity but rather as opportunities to find alternatives to the unhealthy behaviour that is embedded in our culture and expected from male-identified individuals.

ONTARIO ENGLISH Catholic Teachers ASSOCIATION
CTF/FCE
Women and Gender Equality Canada
Femmes et Égalité des genres Canada
30 YEARS white ribbon

Materials:

- Journal or paper
- Tape
- Index cards
- Markers
- Chalk or whiteboard
- Appropriate writing tools such as pens or pencils
- Chart pages with the headings “Objectification of women”, “Homophobia”, “Emotional Stoicism”, and “Encouragement of Violence”

Reflection

Write or post the following for students to reflect on prior to the lesson. Give students about 5 minutes to jot down ideas.

The Catholic Independent Schools of Vancouver Archdiocese state in their anti-bullying policy:

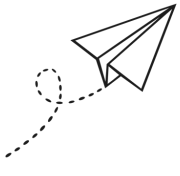
“The foundation of Catholic teaching about life and relationships is respect for the human person. “The equality of men rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1935). For this reason a person who self-identifies as lesbian, homosexual, “bi-sexual,” “transgendered” or “queer” is to be respected as a person.”
How would someone following this guide react to men who act in non-traditional ways (e.g. how they dress or activities they like to do)? (answer, prove, extend)

Activity one

Begin with a discussion on what traditional masculinity looks like. Ask your students the following question:

- What are some traits that men are pressured to display or be in order to be considered “real” men?

There will be a list of terms that the class generates - these can be written onto index cards as they are offered.



If the students are struggling to come up with traits, here are some that might help:

- Aggressive
- Athletic
- Rugged
- In control
- Strong
- Unemotional
- Bully
- Confident
- Humorous
- Plays contact sports
- Heterosexual
- Pretentious
- Perceiving girls as sexual conquests
- Swagger

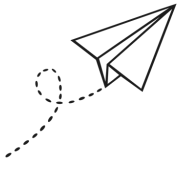
Reveal the chart pages headed with these four titles: The objectification of women, homophobia, emotional stoicism, and the encouragement of violence. Have the students identify which of the terms they came up with would fit onto each of the charts.

Most of these terms will find a place on the charts. Begin a discussion to bring up more terms that can be added.

Then consider, which of these traits/characteristics could cause harm to women, girls, men and boys, and folks across the gender spectrum? How can they harm men of colour? How can they harm 2SLGBTQ+ Identifying men?

This will be an opportunity to address the following topics:

- The negative impact of expectations such as being aggressive, unemotional or in control, on men's mental health and relationships.



- How these expectations impact women by enabling gender-based violence, objectification, sexual violence, child sexual exploitation and sex trafficking

- The violence that Queer/Bi/Gay/Trans men might experience for not adhering to those rigid ideas of masculinity

- How the media representation of masculinity varies among cultural groups producing false and harmful stereotypes.

Wrap up this activity by asking students about alternative traits on masculinity that could make their relationships, mental health, and community well-being better.

These traits can include empathy, emotional management, respect, giving importance to consent, uplifting others, respecting when someone says 'non', and respect for diversity.

Activity two:

Show White Ribbon's Boys Don't Cry PSA

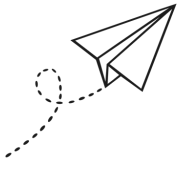
Discussion questions:

- What is the central message of the video?
- What are some examples of unhealthy expectations on masculinity seen in the video?
- Have you ever been told any of the messages that the main character receives? (example: "I need you to be brave", "Boys don't cry", "Be a big boy")
- How does the video make you feel?

Reflections should make students think about how certain types of gendered behaviours are normalized and yet cause harm to others around us. Emphasize the role that each person can play to promote healthy masculinities and gender equality?

Activity three:

This section will ask students to share experiences that have the potential to delve into sensitive areas.



The intention of this activity is to make students aware of the effects of unhealthy masculine expectations and foster empathy for those who are often targeted with unhealthy language and behaviour.

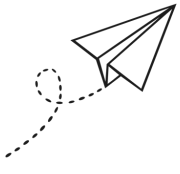
Split the class into groups of two to four students and distribute one of the questions in the 'Questions about unhealthy behaviours, attitudes and reactions' chart below to each group.

Ask each group to discuss the following questions about their particular scenario:

- What would be a response to this question based on the unhealthy negative expectations on masculinity that were already covered? How would it impact the people in the scenario?

- What would be an alternative response to create healthier and better relationships? How would it impact people in the scenario?

Questions about unhealthy behaviours, attitudes, and reactions
A group of guys are standing in the hallway and a young woman they consider to be attractive walks by. What kind of comments do they make about her?
If you have hooked up with a girl at a party, what would you say to your friends about her?
If you know of a male at your school who is a gifted ballet dancer, what would you (or your friends) say about him?
If there is a male at the school who is very involved with and invested in the world of fashion, what would you (or your friends) say about him?
If a male at the school gets overwhelmed during a presentation and cries, what would you or your friends say about him?
If a male goes to church every Sunday with his family and is committed to his moral beliefs, including abstinence until marriage, how does this affect his popularity?
How important is athleticism to a boy's social standing at your school?



If a male has a reputation for having had multiple sexual encounters, how does this impact his reputation with other males? With young women?
If a male has a steady, committed girlfriend, how does this affect his popularity?
Have you ever spoken out against one of your friends for saying something sexually demeaning about a classmate?
Have you ever shared, or have had shared with you an intimate photo that someone trusted another person to keep to themselves?
Do you or your friends ever use social media as a way to poke fun at others? What topic(s) are most common in these jokes?

Wrap-up

It's important to reiterate that the purpose of these exercises was not at all to judge anyone but rather to find areas of growth to impact people in our lives in ways that are positive and meaningful.

Mention how very often young men are asked to follow characteristics and behaviours that are damaging to them and others around them, and that stepping away from these rigid expectations is key in building healthier relationships.

