

PLA Exercise 4

Cartooning

Introduction

In this exercise, participants will explore their ideas about what society expects of us as men and women, by identifying the characteristics of the “ideal” man and woman. This exercise can help participants explore issues related to sexuality, gender identity, gender roles and expectations, and how social norms affect women and men differently.

Generally, it’s fairly easy for participants to identify societal norms related to gender. In order to help participants explore societal expectations for men and women related to sexuality, it may help to tell the participants that they can depict their models without clothes. Many models of “ideal” men and women constructed for this exercise have shown exaggerated body parts, especially sexual organs. It can be useful to draw attention to this in the discussions by asking about the sizes of body parts and asking why society values certain physical attributes and labels them “ideal.” For example, why are “ideal men” usually drawn as hyper-sexual? Why are “ideal women” not? In many societies, the ideal woman is one who is sexually ‘pure’. But in many contexts, characteristics of the ideal man include sexual experience because it is a demonstration of masculinity.

Objective

■ Participants will explore their ideas about the “ideal” man and woman, as influenced by society’s expectations.

Timeframe: at least 1 ½ hours

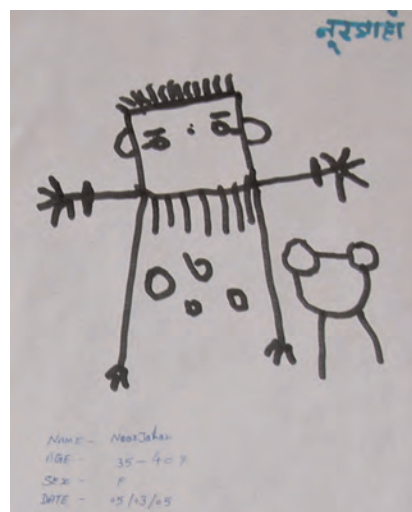
Materials needed: flipchart paper; colored markers

Ideal workspace: large space so people can move around

Number of participants: 10-25



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Young men in the Balkans who did this exercise reported: “Physical strength brings respect” and “Strength dominated in my model.”

They also noted that a large penis is an important characteristic of the ideal man. Some young men indicated that a large penis represents the ideal of “being ready” for sex:

“[He has a] big penis so that he can work hard [meaning sex] because he is a Balkan guy.”

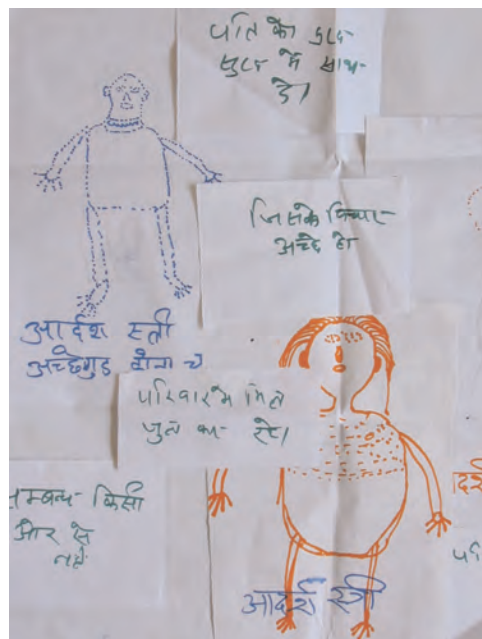
“A strong man has to have strong hands, especially the right one [to be used for masturbation].”

“He is bare-naked, always prepared for action [sex].”

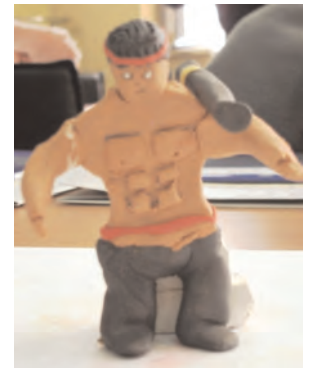
“If a boy is gay, he becomes a female. He cannot be masculine if he is gay.”

Guiding Questions

- How do we learn about what it means to be an “ideal” man or woman? How does your community communicate ideas about the “ideal” woman and man (for example, by family, friends, peers, etc)?
- Besides having physical characteristics, how are we expected to act as “ideal” men and women in our society?
- Are men and women ever expected to show they are powerful? How? Is it different for men and women? Why?
- In terms of sexual behavior, attitudes, or identity, what does society expect from men? From women? Who is expected to be sexually well-informed and experienced? Who is expected to be faithful and pure? Who should expect pleasure from sex? What happens to people who go against these ideals? Why?
- How are most regular, common, typical men and women different from these ideal models?
- How difficult or easy is it to live up to these ideals?
- What is the cost one pays by listening to and conforming to the ideal? In other words, what is lost by conforming to the ideal? What is gained?
- Would you like to change the situation you describe? What can you do as an individual? What can you and others do in your community to change the situation? How can the project assist you and community members in making this change?
- Have you ever wished that a man/woman could behave differently? When? Under what circumstances? Do you ever wish that you were the opposite sex? Why or why not?



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