**TIME:** 1 hour

**OVERVIEW:** Participants will reflect on the impact of sexism, homophobia and gender roles on individuals and organizations by talking through and naming the stereotypes associated with people’s gender. This is an interactive exercise that requires participants to be honest about the ways in which society defines traditional gender roles.

**AUDIENCE:** People who are new to conversations about gender in their work.

**PROCESS:**

I. Gender Box Activity
   20 MINUTES

II. Discussion on the ways in which these stereotypes impact us on a daily basis
   30 MINUTES

III. Key Points and Closing
   10 MINUTES

**ACTIVITY**

We want to spend some time talking about sexism and gender roles and what happens when folks act outside of societal norms and expectations. We also want to acknowledge that gender roles may vary depending on ethnicity, culture, class, ability and family, etc.

When we talk about “gender” here, we are really signaling the need to talk about sexism. Sexism, simply put, is when stereotypical perceptions of women and men result in discrimination against women. But, it’s complicated. We want to make sure to convey that we’re not talking about Second Wave Feminism, which often ignored the realities and needs of women of color, but instead an awareness of intersectional sexism. Intersectional sexism is when the effects of gender are brought together with the societal effects of race, class, sexual orientation, immigration status, and other identities.

*Let participants know that in this exercise we are going to ask them to say words that are offensive to some people as an aspect of their learning.*

*Draw two big boxes on the board/flip chart. Make them far enough apart that you have room to write in about a 3” perimeter outside of the box.*
“ACT LIKE A MAN” BOX

Ask if anyone has ever been told or heard someone being told to “act like a man”.

Write “Act like a man” on top of the first box.

Ask “what does it mean to ‘act like a man’ – what are the expectations (which may not be the reality) behind that question?”

Participants can be invited to come to the board and fill in the boxes or you can do it as a brainstorm. Participants can also do the handout as individuals or in pairs/small groups first, depending on the needs of the group.

Remember that this exercise seeks to look at stereotypes, not at individual behavior. How are men **supposed** to be different from women? - stronger, tougher, in control

What feelings is a “real man” supposed to have?
- anger
- superiority
- confidence

How do “real men” express their feelings
- yelling
- fighting
- silence

How are “real men” supposed to act sexually?
- aggressive
- dominant
- with women
- in control

What are names applied to people who behave in ways that are outside the box? (write these outside the box and around the box) Wimp, fag, queer, pussy, gay

Note: These words are important to say and to write down, but remind participants that we know these are words that are harmful and hurtful to folks and may trigger uncomfortable feelings.

What things happen physically and emotionally to people who act in ways that aren’t in line with those characteristics listed inside the box? (write these outside the box and around the box) Fights, beat up, harassed, teased, abused, ignored, killed

“ACT LIKE A WOMAN” BOX

Ask if anyone has ever been told or heard someone being told to “act like a woman”.

Write “Act like a woman” on top of the second box.

“What does it mean to ‘act like a woman’ – what are the expectations (which may not be the reality) behind that question?”

Participants can be invited to come to the board and fill in the boxes or you can do it as a brainstorm. Participants can also do the handout as individuals or in pairs/small groups first, depending on the needs of the group.

Remember, again, that this exercise seeks to look at stereotypes, not at individual behavior.

How are women **supposed** to be different from men? - nicer, weaker, more gossip, softer

What feelings is a “real woman” supposed to have?
- fear
- sadness
- low self-esteem

How do “real women” express their feelings
- crying
- screaming
- hysteria

How are “real women” supposed to act sexually?
- follow the man
- don’t sleep around
- be passive
- demure

What are names applied to persons who outside the box? (write these outside the box and around the box) Dyke, tomboy, slut, ho, whore, lesbian...

Note: These words are important to say and to write down, but again, remind folks we understand these words can be hurtful, that’s the point of the exercise, to point out these things so we are aware of them.

What things happen physically and emotionally to people who act in ways that aren’t in line with those characteristics listed inside the box? (write these outside the box and around the box) Harassed, abused, ignored, raped, bad reputation, killed
What do you notice about the influence of male and female stereotypes on how men and women are expected to “show up” in the world?

How might those stereotypes influence how people think about leaders who behave in ways that are “outside of the box”?

Which box has more power? Why?

Does women’s power change if they learn to “behave like a man”? In what ways?

How do these boxes contribute to the leadership roles women are “allowed” to have in our country?

How do we change these societal expectations?

These are expectations by society and are not realistic and can be incredibly hurtful, both interpersonally and systemically.

Often, leaders who exhibit characteristics that put them outside of the box are taken less seriously, have a harder time advancing their careers and have to constantly prove themselves worthy of leadership in ways that people who stay inside the box don’t.

Example: (can use an article that summarizes the study here http://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/03/are-successful-women-really-less-likable-than-successful-men/273926/ a handout with more detail and/or specifics from the full study, or just discuss using the following summary).

A 2003 study conducted with business students indicated that people generally prefer male over female colleagues and managers. In this study, the students were told a story about an entrepreneur and in one instance, they named the entrepreneur “Howard” and in one instance “Heidi”, despite having the exact same story, the students indicated that Howard was a more appealing colleague and Heidi was seen as “selfish and not the type of person you would want to hire or work for”). So, clearly many people have ideas about how men and women function in leadership roles and value male leadership over female leadership - Why?

ALSO BE SURE TO HIGHLIGHT THE FOLLOWING:

A gender lens is powerful. We fight for issues that are deeply personal. Using an intersectional gender lens has the potential to rally more people and in a more substantive way.

A gender analysis will give you a fuller and more complete understanding of the issues that you work on. Otherwise, there’s a gaping hole in the puzzle.

Having an agenda that moves women is how you get and keep the women’s vote. Everyone wants the women’s vote, but you won’t be able to sustain it over time unless you’re authentically addressing the real concerns that matter to women, and in a way that speaks to their lived experiences directly.

Knowing more about how your issue impacts your constituents in more nuanced ways will help you win more campaigns and defend against potential attacks down the line.

Not having a gender lens means participating in that very same discrimination that you’re actively fighting against—don’t make the work harder for the rest of us, or for yourself.

When you bring a gender lens to economic issues, things get better for everyone, not only women, but for all of us.