



## Gender Inequality: Princesses versus Superheroes

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### Objective:

To identify the traits associated with “masculinity” versus “femininity” to shed light on the gender inequality that pervades today.

### Opening activity: (5 minutes)

Pass out pieces of scrap paper to your students. Write the word “feminine” on the board. Ask students to brainstorm traits they associate with “feminine” for approximately one minute. Collect their responses. Repeat with the word “masculine.”

### Instruction: (30-40 minutes)

1. Pass out (or project on board) the following questions. Inform students they will be watching a clip of a short social “experiment.” Ask students to jot down notes as they watch the clip.

- Question #1: What reasons do parents give as to why little boys cannot be princesses? Do you find these reasons persuasive?
- Question #2: What reasons do parents give as to why little girls cannot be superheros (i.e. Spiderman)? Do you find these reasons persuasive?

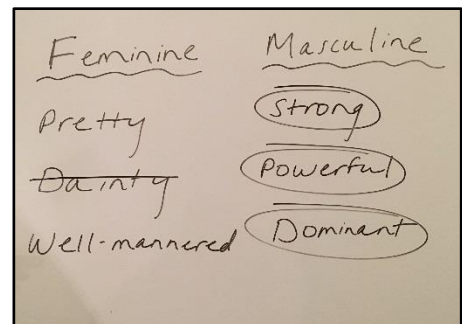
2. Show students a 7-minute clip from ABC’s “What Would You Do – You Can’t Be a Princess” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtFQzMUGbl8>)

3. At the end of the clip, project Question #3 on the board. Give students approximately 5-10 minutes to silently collect their thoughts and write their responses to Questions #1-3.

- Question #3: Do parents react differently to a little boy who wants to be a princess versus a little girl who wants to be a superhero? If so, how do you explain this difference?

4. Write the word “feminine” on the board again. Underneath, list several of the repeated traits students associated with the word. Depending on your classroom environment, you may ask student volunteers for additional responses. Repeat with the word, “masculine.”

- Talk through the list of traits associated with “feminine” versus “masculine.” Ask student volunteers to circle the traits on each list that have a positive connotation and draw a line through the traits that have a negative connotation.
  - Note: alternatively, you might ask students to simply circle words they associate with “presidential” or “leader”
- Direct students’ attention back to their initial responses to Question #3. Give students additional time to update their responses.



5. Ask students to share their responses to Question #3. At this point in the discussion, students are likely to voice the following notions:

- Boys that dress as princesses are more severely reprimanded because they give up valued traits associated with masculinity when they dress in traditionally feminine ways
- Conversely, girls that dress as superheroes are less severely reprimanded (and even praised) because they acquire valued traits associated with masculinity

### **Closing activity: (10+ minutes)**

At the end of class (or as homework), ask students to write a response to the following:

- Question #4: What did you learn today (about yourself, family members, classmates, world leaders, society at large, etc.)? What will you do with your newfound knowledge?
  - Note: you might also ask students to reflect on how this knowledge sheds light on current events, such as the recent election.

### **Additional resources:**

I have taught this lesson in various social studies courses to grades 9-12. However, the lesson can be adapted to fit the unique needs of your students and course requirements. As such, you may wish to incorporate a parallel text/topic into the discussion. This lesson can easily be aligned with:

- Themes of gender inequality throughout history
  - How do the differences between traits associated with “masculinity” versus “femininity” today compare with gender traits exhibited in (ancient Rome/the “Enlightenment” period/colonial America/etc.)?
- Themes of gender inequality among cultures
  - How do the differences between traits associated with “masculinity” versus “femininity” explain the challenges (Malala/Ayaan Hirsi Ali/etc.) faced in (I Am Malala/Infidel/etc.) due to her gender?
- Themes of gender inequality in literature
  - How do the differences between traits associated with “masculinity” versus “femininity” explain the additional obstacles (Maya Angelou/Hester Prynne/Esperanza/etc.) must overcome in (I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings/The Scarlett Letter/Esperanza Rising/etc.)? Use quotations from the text to support your response.
    - Additional texts: *Walk Two Moons*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Harry Potter*, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *Beloved*, *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *The House on Mango Street*, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, *Daughter of Fortune*, *The Namesake*, *Interpreter of Maladies*, *A Room of One’s Own*, *The Color Purple*, *Jane Eyre*, *A Doll’s House*, *The Joy Luck Club*, and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*
- Design of experiments in scientific courses such as psychology, biology, etc.
  - Identify the purpose of and method of experimentation used in the study
  - Identify the independent and dependent variables of the study. What measures (if any) were taken to control the variables?
  - Does the study generate quantitative or qualitative results?
  - How can the study be replicated and improved in the future?