

Opinion Continuum: 'Man up like a girl'

Summary:

This simple activity provides students with an active, engaging way to explore the impact of common sexist phrases such as 'like a girl' (used as an insult) and 'man up'. Students place themselves between two points in the room according to how harmful they think a particular phrase is and discuss why they have chosen to stand there.

Learning objective:

- Students understand what sexist language is and the impact it can have.

Duration:

15 minutes

Age group:

Secondary

Materials required:

- Core exercise: none
- Optional film showing: computer and projector

Instructions

1. Introduce the activity:
 - *Outline the purpose of the task:* to explore what sexist language is and discuss if and why particular words or phrases are harmful.
 - *Describe what the task involves.*
 - *Establish some ground rules:* Students should: not talk over each other, listen respectfully, and be respectful when communicating their ideas.
2. Designate a point at one end of the room as 'very harmful' and a point at the other end of the room as 'not at all harmful'.
3. Give students the first phrase they will discuss: '...like a girl' (e.g. "you throw like a girl"). Ask all students to stand somewhere between the two ends of the room according to how harmful they think the phrase is.
4. Ask students in turn to explain why they have chosen to stand where they are. Tell the students that they can move at any point if they change their mind about how harmful the phrase is. Facilitate the discussion by asking questions (see appendix 1).
5. Summarise the discussion and highlight the key points about the impact this phrase can have.
6. Optional: show the short film, Like A Girl, listed in appendix 1.
7. Repeat the activity for the phrase: 'man up'.

Appendix 1

Supporting information

Questions to facilitate the discussion

- Have you ever heard this phrase being used?
- When is the phrase used?
- What is the phrase implying or communicating?
- How might the phrase make someone feel?
- What stereotypes does the phrase draw on?

What's wrong with phrases like 'man-up' and '...like a girl'?

The phrases 'man-up' and 'like a girl' belittle and undermine women and girls while also reinforcing harmful stereotypes about men and boys.

Using the phrase 'like a girl' as an insult – e.g. 'you throw like a girl' – reinforces the prejudicial view that girls are weak and inferior.

"The term 'like a girl' is often used to describe boys and girls when they have done something weak or rubbish. This can be hurtful to boys and girls but the term shouldn't be used as it's hurtful on all girls who aren't weak or rubbish."

– Female student quoted in "It's just everywhere": a study on sexism in schools and how we tackle it, UK Feminista and National Education Union, 2017.

The phrase 'man up' draws on the idea that men and boys should suppress their emotions and not show vulnerability or perceived weakness - which this phrase indirectly associates with women.

"I have seen this occurring in school when a teacher has told somebody else to 'man up'. This is easily sexist as girls (females) can also become braver than boys (males)."

- Male student quoted in "It's just everywhere": a study on sexism in schools and how we tackle it, UK Feminista and National Education Union, 2017.

"You often hear boys being told to 'man up' or 'not be such a girl' because people think being called a girl is an insult."

- Female student quoted in "It's just everywhere": a study on sexism in schools and how we tackle it, UK Feminista and National Education Union, 2017.

Related resources

Short film: 'Like a girl'

- Published by: Always
- Duration: 3 minutes 18 seconds
- Web link: youtube.com/watch?v=XjJQBjWYDTs

Short film: 'Is it ok for guys...'

- Published by: Lynx
- Duration: 1 minute 1 second
- Web link: youtube.com/watch?v=nx5oYrMuc1M