Topic Summary
The historical and current day impact of gender roles and sexism has been documented and explored at great length. As a society, we acknowledge that sexism exists in a variety of ways—both interpersonally and in our societal institutions. We often think that sexism only impacts girls and women. What is less understood and not often acknowledged is the impact of sexism on men and boys and on our concepts of masculinity.

Over the past few years as a result of the #MeToo movement, there has been a heightened awareness of and discussion around sexual harassment and sexual
assault. One of the most important aspects of that public conversation is exploring how sexism impacts boys and men and our ideas about masculinity. The messages boys receive at an early age about what it means to be male—which can be wonderful and positive and also negative and confining—are very powerful. These stereotypes and messages come from family, peers, the media and elsewhere, telling boys and men how to behave and feel; how they should relate to each other and girls/women; and what their role and stature is in society. Some of these messages are harmful and have short and long-term consequences for themselves, their families, their communities and society as a whole.

Recently, Proctor and Gamble launched a new Gillette (their shaving brand) ad campaign in response to the #MeToo movement. The video urges men to hold each other to a higher standard and to step up when they see other men act inappropriately towards women or each other. The video has received a great deal of attention and strong opinions on social media, both positive and negative.

You can watch the video here: Gillette's 'We believe: the best men can be'

Age
8 and up

Questions to Start the Conversation

- How did you feel while watching the ad?
- What are some of the words and/or images that stood out to you? Why?
- 'The Best Men Can Be' is Gillette's long-standing slogan. How does it relate to this specific ad?
- What are the messages in the video about what it means to be male?
- What examples of standing up and being an ally did you see in the video?

Questions to Dig Deeper
Ideas for Taking Action

Ask: What can we do to help? What individual and group actions can help make a difference?

- Educate others about gender roles, sexism and concepts of masculinity by sharing the video with family and friends and engage them in conversations about it or by helping to organize an educational forum at school.

- Write a letter to family members, the school newspaper or elected officials about sexism, gender roles, etc. and share what impact it has on you and what you think should be done about it. Or, write a letter to Gillette expressing your support for or reasons you disagree with the ad.

- Talk with other students and school officials about policies and practices at school that impact males and females in different ways and explore ways to address those challenges.

Additional Resources

- The Trap of Masculinity: How Sexism Impacts Boys and Men (ADL Lesson Plan)

- Stereotypes of Girls and Women in the Media (ADL Lesson Plan)

- Sexual Harassment in the News (ADL Table Talk)
- How Can I Prevent Gender Bias in Young Children?
- Toward Communication Free of Gender Bias