



LAES has developed a series of immigrant issue instructional modules entitled "Tierra de Oportunidad" for orientation to our complex society.

INSTRUCTIONAL AREA:

Developing Lifelong Learning

Tierra de Oportunidad - Module27

Men's Changing Roles

Overview

For many immigrants, living in the U.S. involves changes in language, laws, and ways for participating in community life and also changes in the way in which members of a family relate to each other. This Module provides a framework for exploring how these differences affect men's lives. The module also explores some of the issues relating to men's roles in relation to women outside the family -- in the workplace and in community life.

The way families live in contemporary U.S. and prevailing ideas about men and women's roles within the family, in the workplace, and in the community can be seen as threatening by men who have grown to adulthood in a small self-contained community with traditional values. In approaching the issue of men's changing roles, it is crucial to respect the desire of men to fill the right role while, at the same time, searching jointly for ways to adjust the interacting styles with each other, of men, women, and children, to live successfully in a new social and economic environment.

In discussing sensitive issues about the roles of men, women, and children in the context of U.S. life, it is not useful to make reference to stereotypical images or examples of machismo but, rather, to urge men and women to look beneath the surface of commonly-held views and routinely question the rationale for ideas about what is right and. It is probably wiser to pay attention to and confront traditional views of the roles of men and women than to attempt to ignore them.

The challenge to instructors in using this module, is to get their students started on the task of reflecting about what they do with their lives, what they think of themselves, and what they want to do to progress. The appropriate goal is to get started, not necessarily to finish or come out with a cut-and-dried official story about what is right.

The appropriate approach for building skills in adapting to changing gender roles is to treat these issues as part of overall problem-solving in life. Interestingly, the problem-solving skills people build in adapting to changing gender roles can, eventually be extremely useful working out problems of conflicting roles at work and in community life as well as in family life.

Basic Skills Development

Thinking Skills

analyzing issues of gender roles as part of overall problem solving, optimizing the benefits for all, and minimizing the personal costs, practicing framing questions, finding and using answers, and "tinkering" with possible solutions.

Learning to Learn

building ability to fulfill non-traditional roles and how enjoyment, curiosity, and "play" are all part of learning; pacing, practicing and communicating about new skills as a foundation for going on to

learn more.

Uses resources

building on home country and family experience with cooperation, recognizing and valuing positive character traits, valuing personal support and social networks, utilizing human resources (co-workers, supervisors) to help solve problems which affect an entire group.

Interpersonal Skills

recognizing family interactions as involving teamwork, considering the different roles of each individual in a team, recognizing each different team member's need for support from others in the team; practicing harmonizing objectives to achieve "win-win" solutions wherever possible.

Uses Information

assessing information from different sources, comparing, contrasting, and evaluating different opinions and personal perspectives, discussing the pros and cons of proposed solutions.

Teaching Points

1. **Women's participation in the labor force is almost inevitable due to bigger forces than an individual's values or personal preferences.** Perhaps the most wrenching changes, in moving to the U.S., even more for older adults, stem from the changing economic life -- views about working, pressures to work, pressures at work, and juggling the demands of work and home life. Most couples, whatever their education and skills level, will find that both husband and wife need to work to attain the standard of living they want. The pressures on educationally disadvantaged families in low-wage occupations are the strongest since two incomes are literally needed to survive.
2. **The issue of whether women work or not is not only a practical one but, it is also an issue about self-worth and self-image--for both men and women.** New roles for working women do not diminish men's roles as wage earners or protectors for their families. Men and women both can be motivated to work not only by economic need but as part of fulfilling their personal potential. Men can be threatened by the idea of their wives working in general, or by women working in men's jobs. Men need to accept, that women in the United States will almost inevitably need to work and want to work for wages.
3. **Families must reach their own accord about exact arrangements and how rapidly they can change.** When women take on new roles working outside their homes, it is inevitable that men must take on new and sometimes unfamiliar roles at home -- shopping, cooking, caring for children, dealing with institutions and agencies such as schools, health clinics, and family support programs. There is no single right balance for men and women's responsibilities at work; each family's goal is to find an arrangement that works well. New roles for men at home and for women at work do not diminish their traditional roles.
4. **Men, as well as women, should be respected for what they do in non-traditional roles and be encouraged to become constantly better in them, and given permission to enjoy these roles.** As men and women take on new roles, one of the challenges is to understand that it is all right to enjoy those new roles and spend time and energy on learning better how to fill these roles. Men who begin to explore new roles in parenting (women's traditional role) need to be encouraged by their wives and respected by children, family, friends, and neighbors as they become more involved. By the same token, women who begin to explore new roles in the workplace (men's roles), for example, as supervisors, managers, trainers, troubleshooters, need to be encouraged to continue developing their skills in this area. These changes in gender roles may trespass many traditional views but that is still satisfactory.
5. **Husbands, wives and other family members may benefit from coaching each other**

in new and non-traditional roles. Women's unpaid work as mothers, problem-solvers at home, responsible and responsive neighbors, and intermediaries between the family and a host of social institutions is not easy. Wives, and also mothers and sisters, can provide valuable coaching to men about how to handle these demands. Men should initiate this coaching by asking for help when they are confused. By the same token, husbands, fathers, and brothers can help women to deal with the non-traditional and possibly unfamiliar experience of functioning in a position of authority as managers, supervisors, and business owners. When men and women agree to help each other with new and unfamiliar roles, the process of changing roles can become one of drawing closer together and developing new perspectives, values, and skills.

6. **In the California workplace, men and women are legally equal and men must learn to treat women as co-workers with the same rights, responsibilities, and benefits as men.** Legally, the picture is very clear. California employers cannot treat workers differently based on their gender. However, the reality is that some employers do not, and some do, and these employers are very attentive to issues of gender equity because they are liable for sexual harassment and for equitable treatment to men and women. Men who do not treat women properly or equitably in the workplace risk being fired and have almost no legal recourse.
7. **In the California workplace, men and women are legally equal and need to learn how to work cooperatively as members of a company team.** Men benefit from treating all co-workers, male or female, in an equitable way -- sharing responsibility, communicating respectfully, and listening carefully to what they say. Practically, the work life of men who try to maintain their traditional dominant roles is much harder than those who can share responsibility equally with women. At the same time, career advancement, requires taking on new responsibilities in communicating well with diverse people in the course of supervision, in the course of responding to a supervisor's instructions and needs, in the course of training, marketing, or consulting. Men who cannot be trusted by their employers to treat women equitably cannot be trusted to treat other people equitably (clients, supervisors, co-workers) and have few chances of getting ahead.
8. **As men move into roles beyond their traditional responsibility as breadwinners, and authority figures to deal with issues traditionally left to women, they will find that these new skills will help them in the workplace as well as at home.** Roles traditionally viewed as women's roles, for example, counseling, nurturing, encouraging, mediating, are all increasingly part of the contemporary team-based workplace. It may be useful for men and women to consider the similarities and differences between the traditional roles of coach and mother. Currently, the qualities of both are considered to be an important part of effective supervision, management, and access to mid- and high-level employment which involves contact with the public or important customers.
9. **Public institutions such as the schools, social services departments, hospitals, and health clinics have not always overcome traditionalism about men's and women's roles.** Men who are not yet certain about the appropriateness or viability of their functioning in roles they have traditionally thought of as women's roles may, from time to time, be thrown off by gender-stereotyped behavior. They should be warned of this, encouraged to take a mental step back to see the situation as humorous, and keep in mind the legal principles of gender equity.
10. **Peer support is a key element in trying out and succeeding in new non-traditional roles.** Men who are involved in traditional women's roles should be encouraged to support other men dealing with this issue. At the same time, men who are themselves still committed to traditional views about the right roles for men and women should at least be encouraged to live and let live and not demean, taunt, or undermine other men's taking on new roles, for example, in caring for children, cooking, etc.

11. **In community life, as in the workplace, men will benefit by recognizing and accepting women's taking on leadership roles.** The reality is that women play a major and, perhaps, leading role in many realms of community participation. There are many reasons for this, but the bottom line is that men who are concerned about their communities and want to work effectively for positive change will need to work well with women.

Sample Learning Activities

** Many of the sample learning activities from Module 11, "Women's Changing Roles" can be used just as effectively, with only minor modifications to explore men's changing roles. Additional sample learning activities are included below.*

1. Ask class participants to list what they consider to be "men's" and "women's" roles at home. Explore any disagreements about how to classify these roles. Once the list is made, ask the class to discuss whether they themselves take on any non-traditional roles for their gender or whether anyone they know does. How do they, or people they know, enjoy the non-traditional roles? How does it work out in their experience? What are the problems? How have they, or people they know, resolved the problems if any? (Most people will be able to address this with some measure of humor. This makes this a good ice-breaker.)
2. Ask class participants to discuss and tabulate how many of them live in households where husbands and wives both work. Then, move on to discuss how much men and women contribute to the economic self-sufficiency of the household. It may be useful to tabulate households as follows: a) where only a woman works; b) where both a man and a woman work and the man's earnings make up 60 percent or more of household income; c) where both a man and a woman work and the woman's earnings make up 60 percent or more of the household income. Class participants should then speculate about how men's earnings and women's earnings are used -- jointly to share household costs? or do men pay for some kinds of things, women for others?
3. Ask the class to debate, in pairs, the view that women should take care of the home while men should work in a job and support the family economically.
4. Ask the class to debate, in small groups, the view that men should be supervisors and managers and that women should work in less important jobs and be respectful to men.
5. Set up a role-play exercise in which a woman-manager at a major automobile repair and maintenance facility and needs to tell an employee, who thinks that only men can fix cars, that he used the wrong parts in repairing a customer's car. Ask a group of four volunteers from the class to coach the female manager ahead of time on effective strategies. Ask another group of four volunteers from the class to critique the role-playing and discuss how they think things will turn out for the manager and her employee.
6. Set up a role-play exercise in which a man, an injured farmworker, and his three children go to apply for food stamps from a suspicious female social services worker, while his wife is working a 12-hour shift at the cannery. Ask the class to counsel him about how to control his temper and get the food stamps.
7. Ask the class to collectively develop a list of "tips" to help husbands and wives agree on who does the household chores, arranges for child care, and deals with government agencies when both are working a 40-hour week.
8. Create a list of "hot button" controversial topics about men's and women's roles which come up in the course of examining men's and women's traditional roles. Discuss a selected "hot button" in a small group.
Some examples of such "hot button" topics:
 - A wife goes to a company-sponsored training session in another state (assuming that it will help her get a promotion) and her husband is left with the responsibility of caring for their

children?

- A wife has a male co-worker bring her home from work on a night shift at 11 PM?
- A husband cooks dinner when he works 20 hours a week and his wife works 40 hours a week, even though she is a better cook than he is?

The point of this exercise is not necessarily to assure that everyone in the class takes on the politically correct point of view for life in the U.S. but to get people talking through such issues.

9. Ask the men and women in the class to coach the other about performing a non-traditional role. What's the best way to select produce? How would you take care of laundry without letting it pile up? How would you get the children to do their homework? How would you deal with men's typical complaints? How would you give work orders to men?
10. Ask the class to discuss strategies for dealing with outside pressures. What do women suggest men do to answer criticisms by both fellow men and women that men should stick to men's roles? How would you encourage men to take on new roles? How would you persuade others to recognize women's right to take on men's roles? How would you respond to parents who feel that a woman should just stay home or the man should not do laundry?
11. Invite a female community activist to talk to the class about her experiences as a community leader and whether she has had any problems with men accepting her leadership. If so, ask her to discuss how she resolved these problems.
12. Invite a local business persons to talk to the class about how their companies feel about gender equity, how they avoid problems of sexual harassment, and what the companies do to train staff to address these problems.

Resources

California Department of Education, Career Development Unit, Gender Equity Office - For information and materials related to gender equity. (916) 558-4860

Internet resources:

California Employment Law - www.employlaw.com

U.S. Department of Labor - www.dol.gov

USDOL Employment and Training - www.doleta.gov/programs
Look for "Women's Bureau"

Non-traditional occupation survey - www.accessil.com/iwttp/nontrad.htm

ESL Commercial Textbooks

- Decision Dramas, Jag Publications
Unit 13, Who will Take Care Of Baby?
- ESL For Action, Addison-Wesley
Unit 7, Moving Toward Equality
- Face the Issues, Longman
Unit 4, Where the Girls and Boys Are
Unit 8, From One World to Another
- Faces: Exchanging Views in English, Lateral Communications
Unit 14, Men and Women
- Faces of the USA, Longman

Chapter 1, The American People: Men and Women

- Heartworks, Inspirations for English as a Second Language, Prentice Hall Regents
Unit 10, Are Men and Women Really Equal?
- Talk It Over, Longman
Boy's Work or Girls' Work?
- Practical Parenting Tips, Bantam Books
Ch. 6, The Changing Family
- Problem Solving, Longman
P. 12, Duong's Problem
P. 22, Tony and Antonia's Problem
P. 77, Somsack and Sy's Problem
- 16 Extraordinary Hispanic Americans, J. Weston Walch
P. 19, Jaime Escalante
P. 25, Edward James Olmos
P. 63, Henry B. Gonzalez

Video tape

Man, Oh Man, Distributor: New Day Films
853 Broadway, Suite 1210
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This videotape explores the forces that mold young boys into men and examines definitions of masculinity, intergender communication, self worth, gender equity, and changing roles.

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