the
sexeducator

22

A magazine for educators who conduct sex education activities with high-school students

Our Romeos:
All they think about is sex, right?

Issues related to masculinity and their consequences on teen sexuality

By Annabelle Marsan

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testimonial

> Boys have a lot to prove. Much is expected of them: they have to be macho and cool, go out with beautiful girls and, if a guy has a girlfriend, he has to make love often.

Darren, 17 years old

introduction

These days, society conveys many contradictory messages about men and masculinity (Pollack, 2001). Boys have to define themselves according to a flood of role models that value opposite aspects of masculinity (Pollack, 2001; Gagnon, 2007). On the one hand, we encourage boys to be cool, confident and strong; on the other hand, we want them to be able to show that they can be vulnerable, sensitive and open. Should boys become virile heroes or prince charmings? The answer isn't so simple.

Boys admit to being confused by the contradictory male role models they see (Gagnon, 2007). What criteria do they need to meet and how must they act if they want to be considered 'real men'? A double standard pressures them into thinking they must have all the traditional male characteristics—courageous, virile and protective— as well as those of the new man who is more in touch with his emotions (Pollack, 2001). Boys are under the impression that they must attain a balance between *macho* and *nice guy* (Gagnon, 2007; Bouchard, St Amant et Gagnon, 2000). Not too macho, not too tender... and not easy to find a middle ground when you're an adolescent on a quest for an identity! **How do we justify linking the themes of masculinity and sexuality?** Development of a masculine identity is at the core of difficulties that boys must deal with (Walker, 2001); the concept they have of masculinity likely influences their sexuality and romantic relationships (Bossé, 2004).

Adults—professionals, teachers and parents—have to understand the issues behind the difficulties boys face in defining themselves as men. We must help them deal with these issues, particularly through interventions related to sexuality (Pollack, 2001).

The sexual education activities proposed in this issue of *The SexEducator* are intended for girls as well as boys. The aim is to help young people take stock of the prefabricated male roles they are presented with (Bouchard, St-Amant and Gagnon, 2000) and to explore the world of boys by encouraging them to talk about their expectations of romantic and sexual relationships (Gagnon, 2007). The process is designed to get them to reflect on and discuss masculinity, relationships between boys and girls, and male or female sexuality. The goal is to help them situate themselves in relation to often confusing messages and models linked to sexuality.

Now let's take a trip into the male world …

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male
identity and
masculinity:

DEFINITIONS TO HELP US BETTER UNDERSTAND

To form an identity during adolescence, you first have to discover yourself. The quest for identity includes finding an answer to the gender-based question, *«As a man, who am I?»* **or,** *«As a woman, who am I?»* **Let's look at how young men deal with this issue.**

Male identity

Developing a male identity is a process through which a boy defines his own aspirations, goals and values; this progressively brings him to develop a profound feeling of being male (Langis and Germain, 2009). Physical changes such growth of body hair, broadening shoulders, muscle development, and maturation of genitals are all concrete proof of maleness that confirm a boy's sexual identity (Langis and Germain, 2009). An interesting note is that early sexual maturation in boys appears to have mostly positive effects since these boys develop physiques, muscle mass and strength that are likely to give them an advantage over their peers (Bearman et al., 2006). Nonetheless, concurrent with the physical masculinization process, boys are under increasing pressure to meet social expectations linked to the male gender (Walker and Kushner, 1997). A boy's identity thus seems divided between the public self he shows, and the private self he is inside (Walker and Kushner, 1997). Indeed, the way a Romeo is with his peers can sometimes be very different from how he is when he is alone with his Juliet (Allen, 2005). Therefore, for 12- to 16-year-old boys, one important issue is to find identities that are coherent with their public and private selves (Gagnon, 2007). It is through personal and social experiences that an adolescent negotiates and tests the need to conform to what is deemed to be 'male', then constructs his own view of male identity, and consolidates these into his own identity (Walker and Kushner, 1997).

Masculinity

According to Pleck et al. (1993), masculinity constitutes a public expression of male identity. To better distinguish between male identity and masculinity, these authors make the following distinction: identity is a process that enables boys to acquire a male role while masculinity is the expression of personality characteristics that are culturally and socially associated with this role. Thus, masculinity is central to the concept of male identity since boys actualize and reinforce their male identities by choosing to express certain traits that are associated with masculinity (Gagnon, 2007). We will now examine in more detail the standards that govern notions of the ideal male.

Criteria for masculinity: The *Real Man's* code

Masculinity is part of a set of social and cultural beliefs that determines what a man should and shouldn't be to be considered masculine. As a rule, society determines what is and isn't acceptable for a boy to consider himself to be masculine and to be considered by others as such (Smiler, 2008). A teen makes up his own mind about what a man should be based on messages he decodes from society and his own environment (Martino, 1999). Thus, masculinity is expressed in conformance with certain criteria (Bossé, 2004), generally defined as not being a woman, not being homosexual (Martino, 1999; Badinter, 1993) and not being a child (Badinter, 1993). Essentially, learning to be male involves staying away from what is feminine (Martino, 1999). Adolescents often adhere to the "code of masculinity", including standards that define a *real man*, which have slowly been assimilated since childhood (Pollack, 2001).

From a very early age, boys learn to behave according to strict rules that define which attitudes and behaviours are acceptable for boys (Pollack, 2001). This ideal male is based on four criteria: "boys shouldn't share their pain and suffering, or openly express these" (p. 60), "they are biologically predisposed to act 'macho'" (p. 61), they have to "be tough" (p. 61) and they have to be "strong and independent, and avoid being emotional and sentimental like girls" [Translation] (p. 62). Boys have integrated these rules so well it seems that most don't dare go against them. For boys, the image of the sexually invincible, aggressive, energetic and insatiable man remains a strong model of the *real man*.

Similar observations have been made in some studies on the concept of masculinity conducted among adolescents (Oransky and Fisher, 2009; Walker and Kushner, 1997; Smiler, 2004; Bossé, 2004; Gagnon, 2007). For the most part, between the ages of 15 and 19, boys are influenced by a fairly traditional concept of men (Walker and Kushner, 1997; Bossé, 2004; Gagnon, 2007). Among the most common masculinity criteria used to define the traditional male role is that of the man who is physically (Chu, Porche and Tolman, 2005; Duret, 1999) and emotionally strong (Oransky and Fisher, 2009; Pollack, 2001; Pleck et al., 1993; Chu, Porche and Tolman, 2005), respected by his peers (Chu, Porche and Tolman, 2005), protective and courageous (Duret, 1999), virile (Bouchard, St Amant and Gagnon, 2000; Duret, 1999), and who thinks only about sex (Gagnon, 2007). Yet, for adolescents who feel the need to conform, these stereotypes can be heavy to bear (Gagnon, 2007; Chu, Porche and Tolman, 2005). Indeed, several studies have demonstrated that boys who strongly adhere to traditional masculine norms are more likely than others to experience anxiety (Walker and Kushner, 1997; Pollack, 2001), have low self-esteem (Chu, Porche and Tolman, 2005) and have difficulties in their romantic and sexual relationships, especially regarding intimacy and romanticism (Marcell et al., 2011; Allen, 2007; Bossé, 2004). They also tend to have more sex partners, riskier sexual behaviours (Pleck et al., 1993) and more focus on sexual performance (Allen, 2003). For boys who subscribe to the idea of the *real man*, becoming a man is not an easy task.

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Boys talk about the fact of becoming men

A 2003 study of a group of 12 American boys (average age of 15) collected data on what "being a man" meant to them (Marcell, Raine and Eyre, 2003). To the question "What does it mean to be a man or a male", most participants answered having a penis, being strong, defending oneself and being responsible. They define a man as someone who is a leader, responsible and mature, stands up for what he believes, and is physically and emotionally strong. In their opinion, becoming a man involves more responsibilities than becoming an adult. It's a well-known adage: "Come on, be a man", we tell adolescents when the time comes for them to start taking on responsibilities and we want to point out their lack of concern and absent-mindedness. And yet, it was the way they described what they need do to show their masculinity that brought to the fore issues linked to sexuality and heterosexuality. Proving their masculinity essentially meant being sexually active and having a girlfriend.
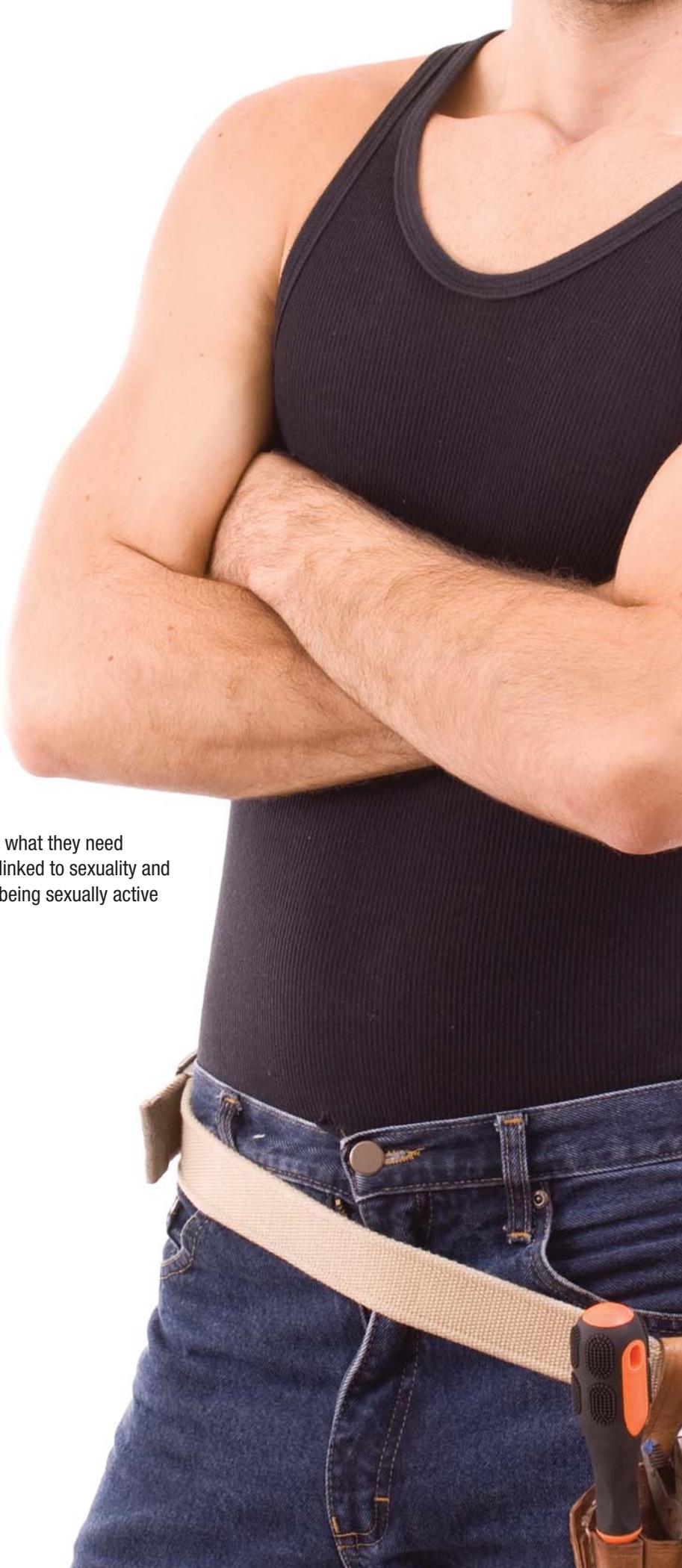
Traditional stereotypes of the strong, courageous and virile man are often the main answers given when adolescents are asked what it means to be a boy (Gagnon, 2007). Five young male Quebecers aged 16 or 17 who participated in the evaluation of a sex education program for boys stated that expressing one's masculinity ranged between two extremes: "macho" and "effeminate". Various ways of being male were required, based on the people they were with (Gagnon, 2007). With friends, boys said they had to act like clowns and show they had guts. With female friends, they felt their roles were to always be there to discuss, provide comfort and have fun. While this type of relationship with girls already requires them to be more mature and serious, boys acknowledged finding it more difficult to understand their girlfriends' expectations. Indeed, boys showed even greater confusion about girls' expectations regarding love. They believe that a girlfriend looks for a boy who is part "bad boy" and part "nice guy", an expectation which they think is contradictory and unclear. As a result, they didn't always know how to fulfil such desires.

On this subject, it is interesting to look at factors that make a boy popular with girls. What does the most irresistible Romeo look like? From a physical and style standpoint, girls say they like boys who are handsome, muscular, tall and well dressed. In terms of personality, they like boys who are funny, athletic and kind, but also may like them to be bad boys and rebels (Duquet and Quéniart, 2009). Therefore, boys are right when they say that girls have contradictory expectations about the type of guy they find irresistible. Girls say they want guys who are honest, sensitive and tender, but they are attracted to rebels and hyperconfident charmers. These are the kinds of expectations that leave boys perplexed regarding how to appeal to girls.

Although these studies highlight the fact that boys generally turn to stereotypes when describing the ideal male, we also understand that significant issues about masculinity arise within adolescents' interpersonal relationships. There are strong expectations when it comes to acquiring the status of *real man*. Therefore, boys integrate different ways of being masculine to meet the expectations of people they are with. As such, constructing a male identity requires them to be chameleons and adapt to different circumstances. During the process through which a boy defines himself as a man, he may turn to stereotypes associated with masculinity to guide his expressions of masculinity. Sooner or later, however, he must think about the requirements imposed by wanting to correspond to a preconceived male model and trying to meet all the expectations related to this model. It is important that boys exercise critical thinking skills to become aware not only of the benefits but also of the drawbacks these beliefs introduce into their lives and their relationships with other people. A key activity on this subject is described further in this publication. We will return to the topic of boys' romantic and sexual relationships later, but first let's look at dating and masculinity.

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Is he who loves another Romeo a man?

As mentioned earlier, in the eyes of boys, heterosexuality is a very important criterion of masculinity. For a boy, the purpose of proving his sexual orientation is not only to show he is sexually attracted to girls, but also to prove to others that he isn't homosexual. For many boys, rejection of homosexuality through homophobic attitudes and behaviours is another way of demonstrating their masculinity, that is, by providing irrefutable proof they are heterosexual (Bossé, 2004). However, the reality is slightly different when boys are asked about this issue. Based on their remarks, it isn't having sex with other men that young people reject; rather, it is the fact that homosexuality is often associated with a lack of masculinity (Duret, 1999). Therefore, it's not homosexuality they don't accept but rather the feminine aspect they attribute to it. It is common for boys to describe homosexuals as having female traits: having a lisp and a high voice, wearing effeminate clothing and make-up, having effeminate body language, all of which are the opposite of the characteristics associated with virility. Such representations of homosexuality are therefore incompatible with the way these boys perceive masculinity. As Bossé (2004) explains, it is a matter of understanding that a man of homosexual orientation is also a *real man*, even though the characteristics associated with him do not confer the popular conception of male status on him (p. 21).
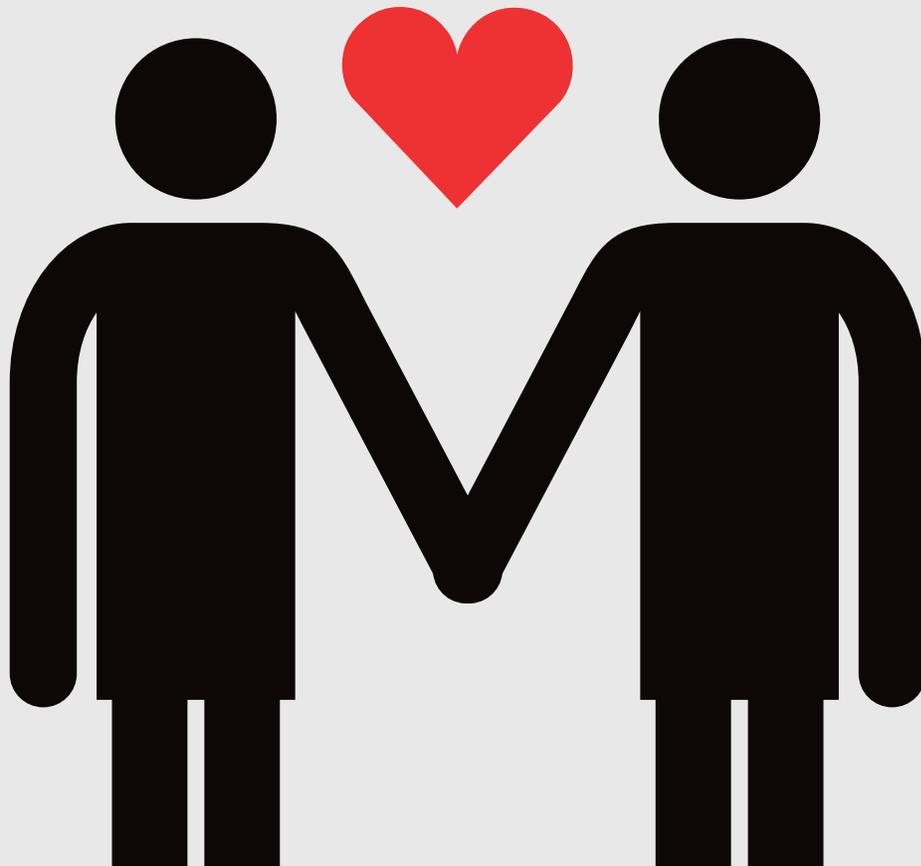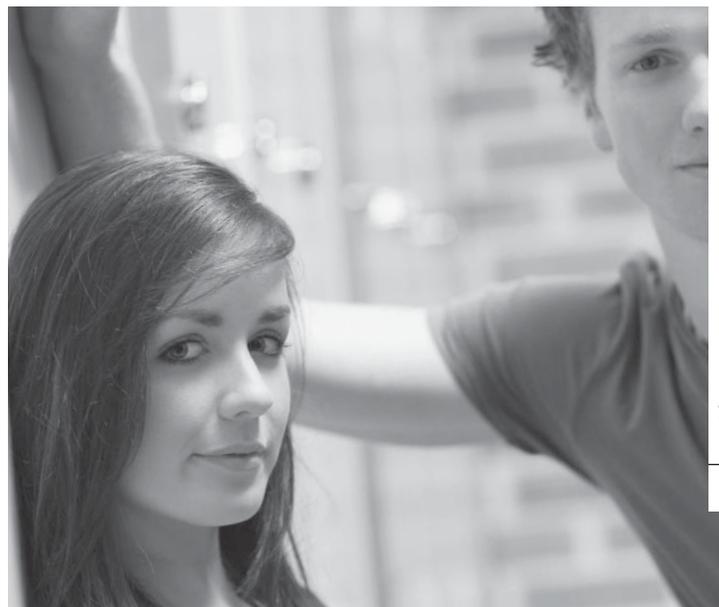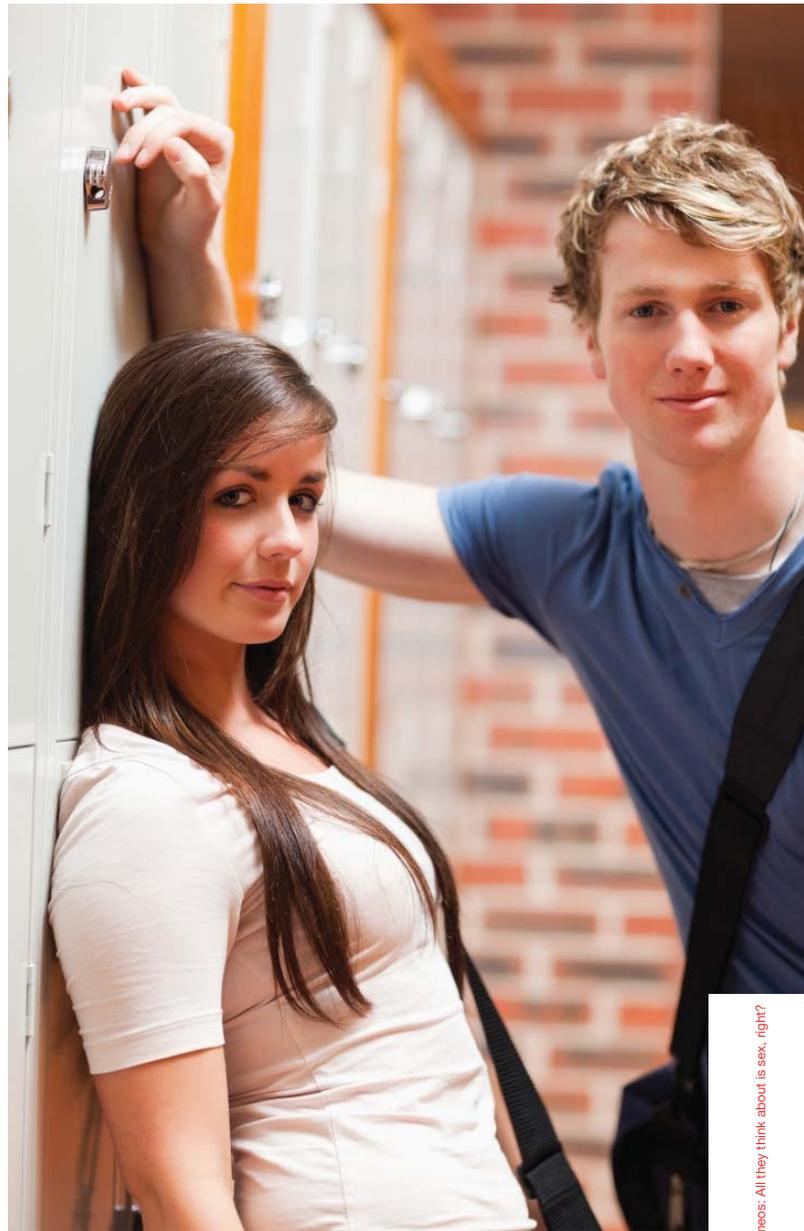
The male art of dating: getting close to girls but staying cool

Dating allows a boy to share intimate moments with a girl and, if they both consent, to meet their budding sexual desires[1] (Bourgeois, p. 5). In our society, it is usually up to boys to play a more active role in dating by showing their interest and desire to the other, and initiating the first date. They take the first steps, make a date with the girl, compliment her on her appearance and pay the expenses related to the date. In this order of things, initiating sexual contact and sexual relations is also up to them (Morr Serewick and Gale, 2008; Seal and Ehrhardt, 2003). Boys consider different ways of proving they can win over a girl, play the dating game and, through their heterosexuality, show they are real men (Cohan, 2009). Although these behaviours can seem stereotypical, to say the least, they are nonetheless the main models boys have when starting to date girls.

Successfully convincing a girl to go out with him is the boy's main challenge when he wants to date a girl. This dating model usually encourages the boy to play a more active role than the girl when initiating romantic and sexual relationships. A New Zealand study of a group of girls and boys aged 17 to 19 collected data on their perceptions of gender roles assigned to boys and girls, with regard to dating and romantic and sexual relations. The young people clearly expressed the idea that boys are only interested in sex and girls are looking for love (Allen, 2003).

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1. For more about seduction, see *The SexEducator* number 18.

Girls felt more vulnerable than boys, given their more romantic ideas of love and sexuality. Compared with boys, girls felt that the emotional side of a romantic relationship is more important than sex itself. Boys' perceived their role in dating to be centred on sexual achievement, especially when they were asked in front of other boys. They saw dating as sexual conquest where men seek to satisfy their sexual appetite while remaining emotionally detached. They said that boys don't have to wait for the "right moment" to have sex with a partner and that they think of sex often during the course of a day (Allen, 2003). A perfect illustration of the dominant heterosexual discourse was given when two boys described their bodies as "pleasure machines". Darren, a study participant, made comments that speak volumes about issues of seduction and masculinity harboured by this concept of masculinity: "Guys have got a lot to prove. There's a lot . . . there's a lot for guys to live up to like uhm gotta be all macho and gotta be cool and all this sort of stuff, gotta score nice chicks or if you have got one chick, you have got to score often" (Allen, 2003, p. 227). With a few differences, remarks of this kind were repeated by boys participating in other studies, notably those by Gagnon (2007) and Forrest (2010).

However, a study by Smiler (2008) of 105 American boys averaging 16 years of age looked at young men's motives for dating and intercourse. The study determined that boys engage in dating and sexual behaviours for a variety of reasons that were distinct from want-ing sex. Indeed, there were four categories of motives, only one of which was related to needing to feel masculine and to prove oneself to others. A minority of boys had seduced girls and had sex with them only to improve their status among their peers. Most boys who participated in the study reported dating a girl because they wanted to get to know her bet-ter without necessarily having sexual relations. They especially felt curious and interested in discovering this person. In a Montréal study of 505 teens in Secondary 1, 3 and 5, 40% of respondents stated they had wanted to go out with someone to prove to themselves or to others that they could do it; a minority of these teens (11 %) wanted to have sexual rela-tions for the same reasons (Duquet, 2005).

The idea that boys only want to have sex remains a stereotype of dating at that age which does not reflect the reality of all teens. Therefore, it is important to help adolescents measure the influence of masculine stereotypes on their ways of being masculine, on dating and on how they view sexuality. To move beyond these notions of masculinity, boys must learn, first and foremost, to accept themselves as they are and be authentic when they make attempts at dating. They must have confidence in themselves, discover their own personalities and ask themselves who they are really trying to please. The problem is not the fact of being male, but of trying too hard to prove it.

To move beyond these notions of masculinity, boys must learn, first and foremost, to accept themselves as they are and be authentic when they make attempts at dating

Love and sex allow Romeo to become a man

A boy's first romantic and sexual relationships enable him to accede to manhood and acquire the status of *real man* and adult in the eyes of the people around him (Pollack, 2001; Marsiglio, 1988). Boys are influenced by their groups of friends but also want to meet romantic expectations of being in couples; as a result, they learn to negotiate contradictory tensions between wanting to prove their masculinity and the desire to have a romantic relationships (Ott, 2010). How do boys conjugate love and sexuality? This a determining question for the healthy psychosexual development and sexual blossoming of young men. We will explore two significant influences that affect boys' psychosexual development at adolescence: other boys, and girls.

With other Romeos...

The remarks of 22 Australian boys aged 15 to 17, collected as part of a study conducted in 2000, reveal the importance of sexual relations in the acquisition of the status of *real man*, in the eyes of other boys. According to the teens interviewed, boys most popular with girls have enviable reputations among their peers and are more respected (Martino, 2000, cited in Bossé, 2004). This might explain that demonstrations of masculinity are particularly present within a group of friends, especially when boys interact around issues of sexuality and girls (Allen, 2003; Cohan, 2009).

In a study by Marcell, Raine and Eyre (2003), boys explained that they pressure and encourage each other to have sexual relations with girls but that teasing each other didn't influence their sexual behaviours. In their opinion, this didn't incite them to have or not have sex because they didn't attach much importance to their friends' comments. They implied that such behaviours are used to build up the male ego among their group of friends. Therefore, boys tend to conceal their individuality by rallying to the group's expectations because peers reinforce an awareness of male identity and shared complicity (Forrest, 2010; Bouchard and St Amant, 1998). Indeed, young men do not express the same attitudes with their friends as they do when they are with adults who ask them individually about their romantic relationships and their sexuality (Drolet, 1996). For some young men, serious discussion about sexuality disrupts their usual forms of male interaction and sees them wanting to manage their sexual identity while concurrently preserving masculinity (Allen, 2005). When among themselves, boys display sexual attitudes that are more often linked with performance than with an openness to discuss commitment, love and romanticism (Allen, 2003).

A recent English study, aimed at determining the influence of male friends on decisions boys take regarding sexuality, analyzed the responses of 17 boys aged 14 to 19 concerning masculinity, sex and boy–girl relationships (Cohan, 2009). The author likened the group to a male fraternity, where boys must show they have what it takes to become men. In this context, a boy's first sexual experience is seen as both a social and personal accomplishment that strengthens the sense of belonging to the group (Cohan, 2009; Forrest, 2010). Boys reported that after their first sexual relations, they had the impression of having greater status with other boys, one that allowed them to talk about sexuality and make sexual jokes.

According to Cohan (2009), the sense of belonging raised by the boys is essential to construction of sexual orientation at the beginning of their active sexual lives. However, the main limitation of the male peer context is that, when it comes to love and sexuality, it does not foster development of attitudes that value intimacy and romantic relationships (Ott, 2010; Bouchard and St Amant, 1998). Boys rarely have the possibility of confiding in friends, whether to share secrets, seek comfort or talk about sexuality (Gagnon, 2007; Ott, 2010). Consequently, they have fewer opportunities to acquire or develop skills to discuss sensitive or personal topics with their male friends such as love, sexuality and intimacy (Ott, 2010). As a result they might feel less competent than girls when a need arises to talk about intimate issues with friends or to confide in them.

What emerges from the discourse of boys who were asked about the notion of intimacy in their relationships with other boys is that they don't think it is possible to talk about intimate issues; they fear being judged if they confide in others, which stops them from revealing themselves to their peers (Gagnon, 2007). Think about an adolescent who feels he has to act differently depending on whether he's with his girlfriend and his friends, or alone with his male friends or his girlfriend (Gagnon, 2007). This is a sign that boys know there is a contradiction between their friends' expectations and those of their girlfriends, which they nevertheless want to meet. In any case, young men need to have emotional links with their friends; adults should help them see the importance of confiding in other boys without being afraid to appear vulnerable or weak in the eyes of their peers (Ott, 2010; Gagnon, 2007). Adolescent boys must feel that their friends accept and appreciate them for who they are; consequently, there is no need to change how they act to meet expectations.

As a professional, it is important to pay attention to the influence a group of boys has on young men's beliefs about masculinity, and on how these beliefs affect their romantic and sexual relationships. Friendships between boys can both negatively and positively affect development of male identity and a boy's capacity to experience intimacy. Therefore, it is desirable that boys establish positive friendships with each other that include trust and support, since these relationships will help them better express how they feel and experience love and sexuality. Ultimately, experiencing intimacy with close friends can be used as a springboard to developing intimate relationships with girlfriends.

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With Juliets...

Many adolescents have their first romantic and sexual experiences between the ages of 15 and 19 (Ott, 2010; Rotermann, 2008). Across adolescence, boys' emotional and sexual relationships progress (Langis and Germain, 2009): romantic relationships last longer, partners spend more time together and become closer both emotionally and sexually. As experiences progress, boys' views about romantic and sexual relationships evolve (Ott, 2010). Their need for intimacy and love may become more important motivations when engaging in sexual relationships, and they are more likely to notice that love enriches sex (Ott et al., 2006).

A broad study of 1300 American adolescents focused on 957 boys and girls aged about 16 years who had started dating; it looked at communication, emotion and influence in adolescent dating relationships (Giordano, Longmore and Manning, 2006). Expectations could have suggested that as when adolescents start engaging in heterosexual relations, boys would do so with greater confidence; however, results showed they were less confident when navigating various aspects of their romantic relationships. The authors underlined the difficulties boys had expressing themselves, especially when they wanted to refuse a date with a girl they weren't interested in, express their needs to their girlfriends, or break up with someone they no longer liked. Boys reported having difficulty communicating with girls, especially when they first started dating; indeed, they reported not knowing what to say or how to act with girls they were interested in but didn't know well. Boys' comments revealed a lack of confidence when they wanted to tell a girl how they felt. Michael, 17, said, "I don't know why I'm so scared to let girls know I like them ... like I said I was always nervous at asking them out but that one experience where I crashed and burned that just killed my confidence completely and I have been scared ever since to ask girls out and stuff ..." (Giordano, Longmore and Manning, 2006, p. 17). The authors explained that concerns of this type and the fear boys have of not measuring up to girls' expectations are closely linked to social expectations for boys. Indeed, the messages boys receive give them the impression that they must always be the initiators, whether this concerns dating, romantic relationships or sexual activity (Allen, 2003).

A Montréal study looked more closely at differences between what boys and girls consider successful in terms of the three themes— dating, romantic relationships and sexual activity) (Duquet, 2005). In all, 505 youth in Secondary 1, 3 and 5 were interviewed; 52% were boys and 48% girls. The adolescents were asked their criteria of success regarding the three themes and whether they themselves meet these criteria. Responses were grouped into various categories for analyses, and indicated that boys and girls proposed different criteria of success. When dating, for instance, boys assign more importance than girls to criteria of "appearance"—such as having nice skin and a nice face, being tall or tall and thin—and to stereotypes associated with popularity—for instance, having a macho attitude, being popular with his friends, or having money. In addition, more boys than girls claimed they had these characteristics. For their part, girls gave more importance than boys to "self-confidence and assertiveness" that is, having a good personality, being self-confident, having one's own style, and being a good conversationalist. More girls than boys also reported having the characteristics linked with "attraction": being charming, having a nice smile or beautiful eyes. In terms of successful **romantic relationships**, more boys than girls found it more important to meet criteria associated "devotion and self-denial"—for instance, agreeing with everything, doing everything the other person wants or spending as much time as possible together—as well as having "an active sex life" that is, being ready to have sexual relations and having sex each time they see each other; more boys than girls reported being able to meet these conditions when in romantic relationships. Girls perceived the main element for successful romantic relationships to be "getting along and communication", which they expressed as having fun together, encouraging and supporting the other person, or being the same person whether you're alone with the other person or with a group of friends; they asserted being able to meet these conditions more than boys. When asked about the conditions for successful **sexual relations**, boys considered "sexual performance" to be important, for instance, the variety of sexual positions or having sex last a long time; they also gave importance to clichés and stereotypes—having a perfect body, having one-night stands or emulating pornographic films. They asserted being able to meet these conditions more than girls. Conversely, girls listed as important criteria "being authentic and being there"—meaning being relaxed, tender or taking your time, to cite but a few expressions—"prevention", which meant using protection when having sexual relations, and "disposed toward intimacy", for instance, being in love, trusting the other person, or both people wanting to have sexual relations. Girls reported being able to meet the conditions for being "disposed toward intimacy".

For boys, *sexual success* is closely linked to the notion of *sexual performance*; for girls, it is linked to intimacy. These differences in perspectives can become real obstacles to establishing *sexual intimacy*. By assigning such importance to sexual performance and to sexual stereotypes and clichés, boys feel pressure to be sexually competent, skilled and experienced; as a result, they are completely at odds with what is most important for girls during these moments: authenticity, being present and feeling close to the other person. We can also add that boys are more likely to feel anxious about sexual performance.

The performance anxiety of young men can be seen in the various concerns they have about sexuality. For example, boys can become preoccupied with penis size, maintaining an erection during sexual relations, making sexual intercourse last a long time, and their capacity to give their partner sexual satisfaction (Forrest, 2010). More often, they have questions about average penis size, male sexual response—especially erection and ejaculation—various sexual acts and how sexual relations proceed (Forrest, 2010; Tel-Jeunes, 2010). These concerns demonstrate that boys think of sexuality in terms of acquisition of sexual techniques, sexual prowess and sexual practices to discover (Forrest, 2010). For them, sexuality is often synonymous with performance, especially for boys who adhere strongly to traditional attitudes toward masculinity. We note that holding these traditional attitudes results in their having more sexual partners (Pleck et al., 1993), thinking that being sexually active heightens their reputation among peers (Bouchard and St Amant, 1998), and placing greater importance on the frequency, quality and variety of sexual activities (Samson and Otis, 1996, cited in Bossé, 2000) on intimacy (Pleck et al., 1993). Their attitudes and behaviours toward sex thus put them at increased risk of sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy (Pleck et al., 1993).

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Table 1 | Boys' sexual performance anxiety

What girls think about boys when it comes to sex	What boys worry about when it comes to sex
• Boys want to impress their friends and their sex partner. • Boys are insecure about their abilities when having sex. • Boys think all their friends have had sex. • Boys say they are experienced so that girls will want to have sex with them. • Boys don't want to say they've never had sexual relations.	• The size of their penis. • The fact that their partner is not sexually satisfied. • Maintaining an erection throughout the sexual relation. • The duration of the sexual relation. • Reaching orgasm at the same time as their partner.

Sources: Forrest (2010) and Allen (2003).

Girls also perceive performance anxiety in boys. In their opinion, boys who want to prove their sexual competence do so mostly to impress other people, be like others, and conceal their real concerns about sexuality (Forrest, 2010). Boys who focus on sexual performance forget that taking the time to get close and discover the other person is a much better way of feeling good and making sex pleasurable. Table 1 shows, in one column, what girls think about the sexual performance anxiety of boys and, in the other column, what boys are most concerned about regarding sexual relations.

Obviously, sex is not the only aspect that counts. Overall, boys agree that intimacy ranks above sexual pleasure and social status (Ott, 2010; Allen, 2003). They want to be nice to their girlfriends by being respectful, protective and available for them (Gagnon, 2007). From about age 16 onwards, boys see respect for girls as a very important value (Gagnon, 2007; Walker, 2001).

There is no doubt that young men think the quality of romantic relationships is important and that they are not only interested in sex (Giorgano, Longmore and Manning, 2006; Smiler, 2008; Allen, 2003). Romantic relationships provide emotional resources that enable boys to consolidate their masculine identities (Allen, 2007). Many boys acknowledge the positive effects a romantic relationship has on their lives, in particular that it enables them to engage in self-disclosure, be intimate and increase their self-esteem (Giordano, Longmore and Manning, 2006; Allen, 2007). Some boys reported always being able to count on their girlfriends, who were there for them in good times and in bad. Others said their girlfriends have had positive influences on them, encouraging them to improve in various areas of their lives (Giordano, Longmore and Manning, 2006). Thus, when a boy is with a girl, he's often more comfortable revealing his true nature and showing his sensitive side (Pollack, 2001).

Despite their differences, boys and girls also have similar expectations regarding romantic relationships (Allen, 2003; Ott et al., 2006). In Table 2, although we see that boys accord greater importance to sexual pleasure, boys and girls agree on elements such as trust, honesty and respect. Moreover, all adolescents perceive intimacy as an important goal of romantic relationships, and most of them believe that sexuality enables them to feel good with and be close to their sex partner (Ott et al., 2006).

Table 2 | Girls' and boys' expectations regarding romantic relationships

Girls	Boys
• Trust, honesty and respect	• Love
• Intimacy	• Intimacy
• Understanding and support	• Trust, honesty and respect
• Love	• Commitment
• Commitment	• Attraction to the partner and possibility of having sexual relations with her
• Pleasure	• Pleasure

Sources: Allen (2003) and Ott *et al.* (2006).

In the end, intimacy appears to be essential to boys' personal development during adolescence, whether in their friendships with other boys or in romantic and sexual relationships (Gagnon, 2007). Through these intimate connections, boys can develop more accurate images of themselves, feel a stronger sense of self-worth and have better self-esteem (Pollack, 2001, p. 314). Finally, progression of their emotional and sexual experiences with girls and consolidation of a male identity pave the way for more mature relationships, where intimacy, sexuality and masculinity can be combined more easily.

So, do our Romeos think only about sex?

Because society sends out contradictory messages about men and masculinity, boys are caught between different models of masculinity and expectations that stem from society or their environments; these can also sometimes be contradictory. Boys have to internalize two opposing representations of masculinity: the traditional image of the strong, virile man, and that of the new man, who is more sensitive and more in touch with his feelings (Pollack, 2001). This double standard influences not only construction of the male identity but also boys' attitudes toward sexuality and romantic relationships. Society and peers push them to act like men by going out with girls, having girlfriends and having sexual relations (Pollack, 2001). Thus, many boys adhere to traditional concepts of masculinity because through their sexual actions and relationships, they need to identify as men (Bossé, 2000). **But do boys think only about sex?** While some may answer yes, a majority of boys consider that this is not true (Gagnon, 2007). Rather, it is the messages that come from society which make them believe that, when it comes to sex, they have to perform, be competent, skillful and experienced. Therefore, wanting to fit the image of *real man* limits the ways boys can express themselves and engage in interpersonal relationships; it especially encourages a model of sexual performance that restricts their ability to engage emotionally in sexuality (Chu, Porche and Tolman, 2005; Forrest, 2010).

By contrast, when norms of masculinity have a lesser hold on their concepts of sexuality and romantic relationships, boys engage in intimate relationships with more confidence. Little by little, they discover that friends accept them as they are and that their relationships with their girlfriends allow them to really be themselves. Sexuality can become a sphere of intimacy in which boys and girls have experiences that over time will bring together love and pleasure.

Therefore, boys have a lot to gain by relaxing their traditional views of masculinity. It is by being authentic, daring to be themselves and being proud of who they are that they stand the best chance of going from "real men" to authentic men.

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LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The approach to sex education should not be limited to assuming responsibility, making decisions, and taking rational protection and prevention measures. Sex education should also help young people understand themselves better and take their places in the world as boys or girls (Duquet, 2003). With this in mind, we propose learning activities designed for adolescents aged 16 and 17 years old (Secondary 5) and that can be carried out either in school or community. We believe that older youth are best able, in the course of pedagogic activities, to discuss issues of sexual identity and the similarities or differences between boys and girls when it comes to romantic relationships and sexuality (Duquet, 2003). On the eve of becoming young adults, they show more maturity and most of them have already had romantic relationships or sexual experiences (Rotermann, 2008) that are likely to inform their thoughts on the proposed themes.

More particularly, boys should be encouraged to think about how norms of masculinity affect their love lives and sex lives (Martino, 1999). In the context of the sex education activities that follow, it seems entirely reasonable to work on reducing the grip that traditional male ideology has [on boys] to help them explore their capacities for intimacy (Bossé, 2004, p. 11) in friendship and love. Encouraging boys and girls to discuss what they are looking for in their relationships promotes the development of communication skills in the former and draws them closer to the latter when they realize that boys and girls have similar needs and expectations when it comes to love and sex. Finally, because numerous factors prompt boys to think of their sex lives in terms of performance, the educator should concentrate on showing that sexuality is a sphere of intimacy discovered by couples, and that mutual respect for each partner's pace causes both of them to feel closer (Tel-Jeunes, 2010).

To facilitate sex education, we suggest ten ground rules (see Table 3). These rules consist of instructions of which the youth should be informed and which they should be encouraged to follow. The students or the person who leads the sessions may add other rules to these ten.

Table 3 | Ten ground rules for sex education sessions

1	Be aware of, sensitive to, and respectful of others' reactions and emotions.
2	Don't make coarse or judgmental comments, and don't insult others or make fun of their comments or questions.
3	Feel free to respond, or not, to a question.
4	Try to use precise terms.
5	Don't personalize questions or situations.
6	Don't repeat elsewhere what other people say during the session.
7	Keep in mind that all questions are welcome and helpful.
8	If you need to, discuss the issue with your parents.
9	Use the pronoun "I" when talking about your own opinions and feelings.
10	Let the teacher or session leader know if you're dissatisfied with the session.

Source: Gouvernement du Québec, *Sex Education in the Context of Education Reform.* Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec and Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec, 56 p.

Possible associations with
the Quebec Education Program and with complementary educational services programs

Goals of the Quebec Education Program

- Construction of identity
- Construction of a world view
- Empowerment

Broad areas of learning

Health and Well-Being
Develop a sense of responsibility for adopting good living habits and with respect to health, safety, and sexuality.

Focuses of development

Self-awareness and awareness of his or her basic needs

Self-affirmation; respect for his or her physical and psychological well-being; need for recognition and fulfillment, need to express emotions

Awareness of the impact of his or her choices on health and well being

Awareness of how behaviour and attitudes influence his or her psychological and physical well-being

Cross-curricular competencies

- Use information
- Exercise critical judgment
- Cooperate with others

Complementary educational services framework

Promotion and prevention services program

Provide students with an environment conducive to the development of a healthy lifestyle and of skills that are beneficial to their health and well-being.

Program offering assistance services

Help students with any difficulties they encounter.

Other associations could develop with other disciplines, other elements of the Quebec Education Program or with complementary educational services programs, depending on the expertise and interest of the individuals called upon to facilitate these activities

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ACTIVITY 1

Duration

60 minutes

Educational goals

- Know the principle criteria of masculinity and the characteristics of a *real man*, and note the differences between boys' and girls' points of view on these issues.

- Recognize the unrealistic side of wanting to conform to all norms of masculinity.

Content

- Male identity and masculinity: Definitions to help us better understand (p. 4-5).

- Criteria for masculinity: the *Real man*'s code (p. 5)

- Boys talk about the fact of becoming men (p.6-7)

Make a man of yourself

Preparing the activity

Make a copy of the questionnaire "A model man" (see page 22) for each participant. Hand out copies of the questionnaire and ask the young people to fill them out on their own, without writing their names (allocate about 10 minutes). Collect the questionnaires and compile the answers before doing the activity the next time the group meets.

Doing the activity

1 Begin the session by announcing the topic, male identity and masculinity, defining these terms, and mentioning that the focus will be on boys. Write down the following sentence on the board: "A *real man* is..." Explain that society delivers several messages about what a boy should be like if he wants to be considered a *real man*. Add that everyone forms an opinion on this subject based on messages picked up from the people around them—in particular, from family members, friends, or a boyfriend or girlfriend—as well as from the media. On the board, list the characteristics of a *real man* and the personality traits associated with masculinity; include what participants mention as well as those in the questionnaires.

2 Initiate discussion by asking the group these questions:

- Do you think a boy must have all the characteristics and adopt all the behaviours associated with the masculine sex if he is to be accepted by others?

- What are the possible consequences of not meeting all these criteria?

  Give examples according to the criteria participants have mentioned. Be careful that a boy who could be teased—for instance, because he is very shy with girls has, never had a girlfriend or isn't particularly athletic in build—is not mocked or rejected by the others. Get the teens to talk about the reasons why, when boys are amongst themselves, they tend to insult each other and use sexist or homophobic comments such as "Don't be a wimp" or "You're such a fag."

- In your opinion, what male characteristics are most valued by girls?

  Get girls and boys to answer alternately, so as to compare the female and male perspectives. Do girls consider that they prefer boys who meet real man *criteria? Do boys think they have to meet these criteria to please girls?*

- What are the consequences of trying at any cost to fit the *real man* mould?

  Expected responses: lack of authenticity, low self-esteem, anxiety, abandoning your values, the risk of being alone, difficulties in romantic and sexual relations.

- Do you think it is realistic to want to meet all these expectations at the same time?

3 End the activity by drawing on the following ideas:

It is difficult to dissociate masculinity from certain criteria generally associated with the image of a *real man*. In our society, these criteria delineate the stereotypes of what a boy who becomes a man should be like. The ideal of a man who is protective, courageous, virile, and physically and emotionally strong is quite widespread. This image does not take into account the particularities and characteristics that make each boy unique. One should remember that it is quite normal for boys to behave in one way or another because they want to express certain personality traits associated with the male role. Moreover, there is no shame in wanting to protect your girlfriend or one of your friends, or in displaying courage in a dangerous situation. For boys, the important thing is to be able to step back from these criteria of masculinity and not let them become masks to hide behind to prove to others that they are real men. To discover who you really are as a boy is to define your real identity in terms of your aspirations, goals and values, without necessarily being a prefect replica of a *real man*. Unlike the latter, an authentic man is one who dares to be himself, allows himself to express his emotions, thoughts and desires, and has enough self-confidence to show who he really is.

4 Optional.
Give a sheet of paper to each adolescent. You can use different colours for girls and boys. Everyone will write down the name of a man of any age, well-known or not, whom they admire, and list the reasons why they admire him so much. This is an anonymous exercise: answers remain confidential. Collect the copies and collate the answers to present them at the next session.

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A MODEL
MAN

For each of the following statements, put a check mark in the box that corresponds to your answer.

IN MY OPINION, A *REAL MAN* IS	YES	NO
1. A boy who knows how to make others respect him.		
2. A boy who is right in the middle of the spectrum that goes from macho to effeminate.		
3. A boy who does not reveal his weakness (for example, he doesn't talk about his personal problems or his emotions).		
4. A big, muscular, handsome, well-dressed guy		
5. A boy who avoids showing feelings when he is with his friends (for example, he is less affectionate with his girlfriend when he is with his friends).		
6. A boy who is always ready to have sex.		
7. A boy who acts as if everything's fine even when something is bothering him (with his girlfriend or friends).		
8. A boy who takes the initiative to flirt with a girl with whom he wants to go out.		
9. A boy who never refuses to have sex.		
10. A boy who is protective and brave.		
11. A boy who talks about his sexual performances or acts as if he has lots of sexual experience.		

Real man **versus** authentic man

Preparing the activity

Give each participant a sheet containing the statements taken from the box *Myth or Reality?* (See following pages)

Doing the activity

1 Ask the adolescents to form mixed-gendered teams of 4 or 5. Present the activity by explaining that it is about behaviours and attitudes of boys related to seduction, romantic relationships, and sexuality.

2 Read out the statements in the box entitled "Myths or Realities?" Ask the young people to each write their responses to these statements on their sheets as you read them out. Then ask them to take turns sharing their responses with their team members and to record the main points of their discussion.

3 With the help of the questions below, start a discussion among the students. For each question, members of each team should present their answer as myth or reality. The goal is to get the youth to reflect as a group and to show them that exchanging ideas can cause their thinking to evolve. In effect, the discussion is likely to reinforce the points of view held by some, and cause others to change their minds about the statement.

Questions to stimulate discussion

- To the youth who chose myth: What are your reasons for thinking it's a myth? In your opinion, what would better represent the reality that this statement deals with? How do you explain that, for some people, it could be a reality?

- To the youth who chose reality: Why do you think it's a reality? What are your impressions of this reality? Can you imagine that reality could be different? That, for example, a boy would tell his girlfriend that he'd rather wait before having sexual relations with her?

- Addressing, in alternation, those who answered myth and those who answered reality: What are the positive or negative effects of this myth or reality on 1) a boy and a girl who are dating; 2) a romantic relationship; 3) sexuality?

Duration

75 minutes

Educational goals

- Recognize the realities and myths concerning behaviours and attitudes expected of boys in relation to seduction, romantic relationships and sexuality, and the consequences of these expectations.

Content

- The male art of dating: getting close to girls, but staying cool (p. 9-10)
- With other Romeos... (p. 12-13)
- With Juliets... (p. 14-15)
- Table 1: Boys' sexual performance anxiety (p. 16)
- Myth or reality (p. 24-25)

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4 Close the discussion on each statement using the avenues of reflection proposed in the box.

5 Conclude the activity with the following message:

There are several myths about the behaviours and attitudes that real men should have in relation to dating, romantic relationships, and sexuality. In some cases, male myths are rooted in our minds to such an extent that they influence how we see things, even leading us to believe that they are realities. Our discussions have allowed us to see that reality is often quite different from what is depicted in the messages disseminated in our society. When a boy is interested in a girl, for example, he can indeed want to have sex with her, but this does not stop him from wanting to really get to know her better because he finds her beautiful, kind, smart or funny. Furthermore, boys who don't believe they meet the *real man* criteria may think girls aren't attracted to them, and that they don't meet their friends' and society's expectations. In love as in sexuality, it is important to remember that it is unrealistic to want to meet all the behavioural criteria required of boys if they are to be seen as real men. To be real in your relationships with others you have to accept yourself as you are now, ask yourself who you really want to please, and continue to question the norms of masculinity.

MYTH OR REALITY

1 **Boys attribute less importance to the emotional aspect of romantic relationships than to the sexual aspect, and thus are less vulnerable.**
MYTH.

Studies show that boys do attach importance to their romantic relationships, and that developing intimacy with their girlfriends is more important than just having sex. The fact that the emotional lives of boys differ from those of girls sometimes creates confusion about what each of the partners needs and desires in a romantic relationship. The reality is not that boys are less vulnerable than girls in love, but rather that they are more likely to hide their feelings, leaving others to believe that they attach less importance to the emotional side of the relationship. This can be seen in the difficulties boys have telling their girlfriends about their needs and desires, and by their lack of self-confidence when it comes time to reveal their feelings. Though boys have more trouble communicating their emotions, their expectations are similar to those of girls when it comes to things such as trust, honesty, respect and intimacy in a romantic relationship, (Allen, 2003; Ott et al., 2006).

2 **Unlike girls, boys don't need to wait for the 'right time' to have sex with their partners.**
MYTH.

The 'right moment' for having a sexual relationship varies from person to person. The fact of being a boy or a girl does not determine this judgment. It's a personal choice! For some people, the 'right moment' occurs spontaneously, without any real planning. For others, it requires taking the time for partners to get to know each other. In each case, the important thing is to define what we really want, according to our values related to sexuality. Moreover, we have to be able to let the other person know about our own tastes and limits, while staying sensitive to theirs. It's through communication and respect that these moments become good moments!

3 **Boys think about sex more often than do girls.**
MYTH.

It isn't easy to determine whether boys really do think about sex more often than girls do. It can be said that, when it comes to sexuality, boys and girls are socialized differently. Thus, there seems to be a double standard governing sexuality in our society, one for males and one for females. What this means, concretely, is that boys view pleasure-focused sexual activity more positively than girls. Social expectations for boys and girls are contradictory, and this is why it may be delicate for a girl to admit that she thinks about sex or for a boy to say that he isn't interested in sex. For adolescent girls or boys to feel sexual desire and have exciting sexual thoughts is completely normal. What's more important is that the strength of your sexual desire corresponds to what you really feel deep down, rather than to stereotypes of male sexuality.

4 **It's up to boys to take the first steps when it comes to dating or to having sexual relations.**
MYTH.

In our society, it's often left up to boys to take the first steps when it comes to dating a girl or to having sexual relations. By giving the impression that they should take the initiative, this encourages boys to play a more active role than girls in romantic or sexual relationships. Asking someone out on a date, complimenting her on her appearance, and paying for her movie ticket are good ways to show you are attracted to and interested in her. But whether it's a question of dating, love or sex, the active role is not exclusively the boy's. The idea is that, rather than just playing the role assigned to a boy or a girl, it's much better to stay true to yourself and use your creativity to find original and unique ways to attract the attention of another person.

5 **Boys are interested in girls and establish relationships with them because they want to do what their friends do.**

MYTH AND REALITY.

It's true that some boys hang out with girls because they want to do what their friends do, but it's wrong to think that ALL boys do so for this reason. An adolescent who goes out with a girl so he's not the only one without a girlfriend is motivated more by a desire to conform with other boys than by attraction to this girl. The boy should ask himself why his need to be like other boys has become so important in his relationships and ways of acting with girls. Is it fear of being teased? Is it to prove to others that he is capable of charming a girl? Is it because the fact of going out with a girl or of being in a couple improves his standing in others' eyes? When you're interested in someone, it's important to have positive, honest and sincere motivations. The best way to behave is to be yourself while respecting others.

6 **Being Don Juan and seducing girls boosts an adolescent's reputation with other boys.**

REALITY.

In certain groups of boys, being a seducer and having sexual relations boosts your standing; it makes you seem cooler and more popular. Moreover, boys often tend to encourage each other to have sexual relations with girls. Such teasing reinforces their 'male ego'. Thus some boys can feel pressure to hang out with girls just to feel accepted and acknowledged by their peers. A group of boys is quite like a fraternity of which each member must show he has what it takes to become a man. It's important, nonetheless, not to hide your real personality behind the expectations of a group of friends.

7 **If they want to please girls, boys not only have to be funny, nice and athletic, but they must also have a rebel streak.**

MYTH AND REALITY.

When you ask girls about the different characteristics they like in boys, this statement seems to be true. When it comes to style and physique, they say they like boys who are handsome, athletic, big and well dressed. When it comes to personality, they like boys who are funny, active in sports, and nice, but they also like a touch of bad boy, of rebel. For boys, the rebel streak contradicts the other characteristics that girls look for. Therefore, boys are often puzzled as to what they should do to please girls; it's often hard for them to figure out what girls want.

8 **When a boy is interested in a girl, it's because he wants to sleep with her.**

MYTH.

Boys are interested in girls and have sexual relations with them for a variety of reasons other than sex. Most boys, in reality, want to hang out with girls because they want to get to know them better without necessarily sleeping with them. What motivates boys to establish relations with girls can be classified into four categories: 1) conformity, which is, doing what others do; 2) shared interest, for example, a passion for a sport; 3) attraction, notably feeling a connection to a girl because he finds her beautiful; 4) interest shown by the girl, being pursued by the girl (Smiler, 2008). The majority of boys aren't interested in girls solely because they want to have sex with them. They are mostly curious and interested in discovering the other. The idea that boys are only looking for sex remains a stereotype at this age and doesn't reflect the reality of all boys.

9 **Boys have more difficulty talking about intimate topics such as sex and love or in confiding in others.**

REALITY.

The relationships boys have with each other do not always encourage positive attitudes about intimacy and romantic relationships. They push some boys to have different attitudes on these subjects when they are with their friends, when they are consulted individually (Drolet, 1996), or when they are with their girlfriends (Allen, 2005). In front of their friends, they usually want to show that they are sure of themselves and to act macho; when consulted individually, they more readily reveal their gentle sides. The reality is that it is rarely possible for boys to confide in their friends, either to share secrets, to be comforted, or to talk seriously about sex. They have less chance to discuss delicate or personal subjects such as love, sex and intimacy. Yet, boys also need to feel that they can reveal themselves to their friends without fear of appearing vulnerable or weak. It's often through contact with girls that adolescent boys grasp the importance of intimacy and learn the positive effects of such relationships in their lives. For example, a romantic relationship can increase a boy's self-confidence or give him the opportunity to reveal himself and to experience intimacy. Whether with friends of either sex, or with girlfriends, it is important to create bonds of intimacy that will help them feel good, accept themselves as they are, and have greater self-esteem.

10 **For most boys, sexuality is synonymous with performance.**

REALITY.

This is true for boys who hang on to a rather traditional concept of masculinity, which can have repercussions on their sexual behaviours and attitudes. It can lead them to have more sexual partners, to the idea that being sexually active boosts their reputation, and to assign more importance to the frequency of sexual encounters or to performance during these encounters. Boys with such behaviours and attitudes, however, are exposed to the risks of sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancies. It should be said that, even if they don't talk about it, boys can feel pressure to be skillful and experienced when they have sex. This pressure can provoke various worries about sexuality (see Table 1 on p.16 about sexual-performance anxiety among boys). At the end of the day, performance isn't all that counts! A sexual relationship is a sphere of intimacy explored by two people and, if this is done respecting each partner's pace, they can feel close to each other.

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ACTIVITY 3

Duration

75 minutes

Educational goals

Reflect on how norms of masculinity affect the behaviours and attitudes of boys in particular situations.

Content

- Love and sex allow Romeo to become a man (p. 12)
- With other Romeos... (p. 12-13)
- With Juliets... (p. 14-15)
- Table 1: Boys' sexual performance anxiety (p. 16)
- Table 2: Girls' and boys' expectations regarding romantic relationships (p. 17)

Love, sex and masculinity: the challenge of being yourself

Doing the activity

1 Make two copies of each scenario (see next page). Prepare extra copies if there are more than six teams.

2 Distribute the scenarios so that each one is analyzed by both a team of boys and a team of girls, to highlight the similarities and differences between boys' and girls' points of view.

3 Ask the young people to read the scenario they have received and to answer the proposed questions. Allocate about 15 minutes for this analysis.

4 Invite a representative from each team to share the responses with the other teams. We suggest that the boys' teams report first.

5 Lead a discussion involving all the participants with the help of the following questions:

- When they're together, how do boys talk about girls? About sex? Is this different or similar to what girls say when they are together? Explain.
- When boys are with their girlfriends, how do they talk about love and sex?
- Is really difficult for boys to talk sincerely amongst themselves about their feelings about love and sex?
- Should boys live up to the *real man* image when talking about sex? If yes, how? If no, why not?
- What's more difficult for boys: talking about sex or talking about love?
- With whom, and in what circumstances, do boys feel most at ease in confiding their feelings about intimate subjects such as love and sex?
- What can boys do to not feel torn between their male friends and their girlfriends.

6 Conclude the activity with the following message:

Because of the effects norms of masculinity have on a person's love life and sex life, it can sometimes be embarrassing for boys to show themselves to be loving, worried, fragile, romantic or sexually inexperienced. There are strong pressures on boys to have the characteristics of the so-called *real man* in order to be accepted by other boys and to please girls. Above all, no one wants to lose face in front of others! That's why some boys will decide to lie about sex, to try to impress others, to pretend to be tough guys. Others will literally hide aspects of their personality and private life to avoid having to confront their friends. It's never easy to open your heart, but nor is it easy, in the long term, to wear a mask. It's true, of course, that you feel more vulnerable when you reveal yourself and confide in others. Nevertheless, if your friends are true friends, and the person you love accepts you as you are, you will be respected and, no matter what they are, your confidences and fragilities will be welcomed. For your part, by remaining sensitive to what people around you feel, you give yourself the chance to forge positive and intimate bonds with those you love. This, moreover, is a sign of maturity. One thing is sure: daring to be yourself and saying what you really think demands a lot of courage! Over time, living through various experiences, you acquire the confidence needed to affirm yourself and your values, and it is precisely this maturity that allows you to take your place as a man. In the end, guys, remember this: your best weapon when it comes to dating girls is probably the natural you! That's what they love: authentic guys.

SCENARIOS

Matteo's lie

After the hockey game, Matteo is with his friends in the dressing room. The boys are talking about girls with whom they have had sex. Matteo listens to them. Most of them tell how they came to sleep with such and such a girl. Matteo, for his part, has been with Andréanne for several weeks and is deeply in love. They have not yet had sex; Andréanne told him that she isn't ready, that she would prefer to wait. Matteo has always respected his girlfriend's request and never pressured her to have sex. Yet, when his friends ask him how it's going with Andréanne, Matteo tells them that they have had sex a number of times, and he invents stories about their sexual activities. Since then, he has been worried that his friends will find out the truth and he feels ill at ease with Andréanne.

- **What do you think of the attitude of the other boys in the locker room?**

- **Why, in your opinion, did what they say have this effect on Matteo?**

- **What do you think of Matteo's attitude?**

- **What would you have done in his place?**

- **What should a boy do in this situation?**

The two faces of Guillaume

Guillaume and Laurence have been going out for three weeks. The two are blissfully happy, but something is really bothering Laurence. She has noticed that, when it's just the two of them, Guillaume is very attentive and affectionate, but when he's with her and his friends, his attitude completely changes. You could say he plays the macho man, and becomes more distant. The other day, he was talking in front of everybody, with the air of a conqueror, about the girls he had gone out with and what he had done with them. He even revealed that he had not always used protection when having sex and described some of the girls as 'easy'. Laurence wonders why he acts like this.

- **What do you think of Guillaume's attitude?**

- **Why do you think Guillaume has a different attitude when he's with his friends than when he's alone with Laurence?**

- **In Guillaume's place, what would you do? And in Laurence's place?**

To tell or not to tell, that is the question

Seventeen-year-old Aymeric is with his friends and the talk turns to sex. As he knows, these 'guy discussions' always end in derision or in a competition to determine who has screwed the most, who has the most experience with girls. This time, however, he would like to talk seriously because something about his sex life with the beautiful Juliet concerns him. What Aymeric cannot manage to reveal to his friends is the fact that he is worried by his inability to make his sexual encounters with Juliet last long enough. Everything happens faster than he would like. Yet this never happened to him before. Even though Juliet has not said anything to him about this, he fears that she's disappointed in their sexual relations. Since he's sure his friends would tease him if he revealed his concerns, he chooses not to talk to anyone about it.

- **What do you think of Aymeric's decision to say nothing?**

- **What do you think would happen if Aymeric were to decide to talk to his friends about his concerns?**

- **What could happen if he decided to talk to Juliet about his concerns?**

- **What can a boy do in this situation?**

- **If you were Aymeric's friend, what would you say to reassure him? If you were his girlfriend, what would you say to reassure him?**

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