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# 1

## A New Outlook on Relationships

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**Session Length: 2 hours**

### Objectives

Establish the goals and purpose of the workshop

Explore male and female sex roles and their impact on relationships

Define personal goals for improving intimate relationships

### Rationale

Most men have had few opportunities to seriously explore and define their sexuality and their need for intimacy. This lack of opportunity is perpetuated by social and cultural beliefs that often go unchallenged. This session seeks to increase participants' willingness to explore new ways of thinking about sexuality, love, and intimacy, and to work on personal goals for improving relationships.

### Session Outline



Procedure	Time
<i>Client Survey</i> (pretest)	15 minutes
Getting Started	10 minutes
Group Introductions and Guidelines	20 minutes
Challenging Stereotypes	20 minutes
Break	10 minutes
Improving Relationships	35 minutes
Homework: <i>Partner Interview</i>	10 minutes
<b>Total Time for Session 1</b>	<b>120 minutes</b>

## Materials

Pocket folders (one for each participant)  
 Easel and flip chart (or chalkboard)  
 Magic markers; pencils, pens, writing paper  
 Prepared flip chart *Group Goals*  
 Prepared flip chart *Group Agreement*  
 Prepared flip charts *Ideal Man* and *Ideal Woman*  
 Copies of handouts

## Preparation Notes

*Prepare  
flip charts*



### Group Goals

Write out the suggested group goals on a large piece of flip chart paper or poster board, as shown.

#### Group Goals

**To strengthen recovery by improving our relationships.**

**To learn more about ourselves.**

**To improve our health.**

**To challenge insecurities and improve self-esteem.**



### Group Guidelines

Write out the suggested group guidelines on a large piece of flip chart paper or poster board, as shown.

#### Group Guidelines

**Stick to the topic.**

**Participate!**

**Respect ourselves and each other.**

**What's said here, stays here!**

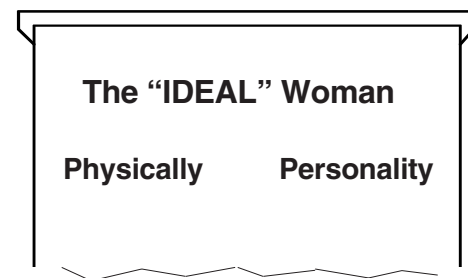
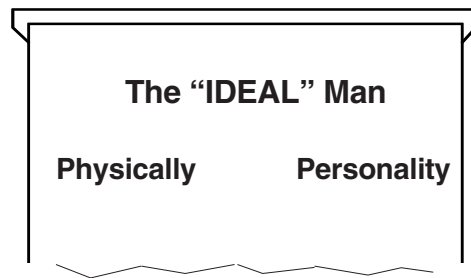
**Avoid bragging, boasting, and other mind-games.**

**Support each other!**



### Ideal Man and Ideal Woman

Write out the “shell” for the *Ideal Man* and *Ideal Woman* discussion activities on two pieces of flip chart paper or poster board, as shown:



Photocopy  
handouts



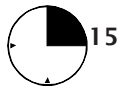
*Client Survey* (pretest, pp. 225-227)

*A New Outlook on Relationships* (worksheet, p. 13)

*Partner Interview* worksheet (homework, p. 14)

*Session Evaluation* (form, p. 15)

## Procedure



### *Client Survey*



Pretest,  
pp. 225-227

**Allow about 15 minutes for completion of pretest.**

Welcome each person as he arrives and ask him to complete a *Client Survey* (pretest).



### *Getting Started*

- 1 Begin by explaining the purpose of the workshop. Use the first 10 minutes to discuss what the workshop is about and the topics to be covered.** Many participants will need some reassurance and validation for attending this type of workshop. It's natural for most of us to have trouble admitting that we have any lack of knowledge or any problems with sex, intimacy, and relationships. It's important that your opening comments help develop trust and rapport and that you convey a genuine sense of caring and openness.

**Read over the following script for ideas on what to say to get started:**

This workshop is designed to help us learn more about sexuality, love, and building stronger, better relationships. Everyone has questions and concerns about love, sex, and intimacy—but we seldom get the chance to talk openly and honestly with one another. It's normal for you to have some doubts about being here and to wonder what you can get out of this class. That's something each person needs to answer for himself—some questions to ask yourself are:

Am I satisfied and happy with my sex life and my relationships?  
 Are there any recurring relationship problems that cause me or my partner unhappiness?  
 Do I ever feel isolated, lonely, “bad,” or unlovable?  
 Am I sometimes confused about how I feel and act?

If you don't sense you are having problems in these areas—that's wonderful! We encourage you to participate in this group and share with us how you handle relationship problems in a positive way. On the other hand, if you recognize there are things about yourself and your intimate relationships that you would like to feel better about, this group can help. The only requirement is that we agree to be honest with ourselves and each other. We sometimes try to hide our insecurities by boasting, bragging, and playing “one-up” with each other. We'd like for this group to be a place where we can put all of that aside and work to help ourselves and each other feel better about who we are as men and how we can make our relationships work out the way we want them to.

As group leaders, we don't have all the answers. In fact, we probably struggle with the same kinds of problems that you do from time to time. But we do have some ideas about why relationship troubles develop and what we can learn to do differently to help solve some kinds of problems. We believe that relationships are important and worth an investment of time. We also believe that you deserve to have happy, satisfying, intimate relationships and that you have the ability to learn how to make your relationships better. That's what this group is all about.

Men are sensitive, much more so than society allows us to believe. Often it is said that women are the ones who feel, while men are the ones who are logical and levelheaded. The truth is that both men and women have strong emotions and feelings (and both men and women are able to be logical and levelheaded). This is true because both are human beings. However, society does teach men not to express their feelings openly, especially when it comes to the “softer” emotions. The result is that men often feel alienated, lonely, cutoff, and misunderstood when they try to deal with their feelings. One thing we'll do in

this group is look critically at some of society’s “rules” for men and women to see if we really agree with them. Sometimes relationship problems develop because the partners have never challenged society’s stereotypes for men and women. All we suggest is that you keep an open mind as we explore these issues in the group.

Finally, there’s the impact of addiction and recovery on relationships. As we become stronger in our recoveries, we often begin to see the need for making changes in our relationships. We may be carrying some guilt, shame, and sadness over the things we did to ourselves, our partners, and our families in order to support our habits. We need to explore these feelings in order to regain the self-respect and self-esteem needed for a healthy relationship. Our partners may need some help as well—and hopefully this group will give you some information and skills for helping your partner, too. Addiction is tough on relationships, no matter how resilient, loving, or forgiving a partner may be. If both partners have a shared history of addiction, the challenge may be even harder. The important thing to remember is that change is possible! In fact, change is inevitable. This time next year, we all will have changed to some degree, for better or worse. Our decision for today might be to guide the progress of these “natural” changes for the better.

So, over the next few weeks we’re going to talk men-to-men, and try to generate some ideas about how we can be happier with ourselves, our sexuality, and our relationships. We’ll discuss sexuality issues such as anatomy, sexual functioning, reproduction, and staying healthy. We’ll also talk about developing a stronger sense of self-esteem and learning more about managing our feelings and getting our needs met. And most importantly, we’ll look at ways to make our relationships stronger, deeper, and closer.

Each group will end with a homework assignment. This will be in the form of an exercise or activity that you do with your partner. If you don’t have a partner, you can do the homework with a friend, relative, or anyone who can help give you a woman’s perspective. The assignments are designed to help you with your communication skills, and no assignment will be embarrassing or put you on the spot.

I’ll close the introduction by saying that we’re glad you’ve come to this group, and we look forward to seeing you at all 8 sessions. The last session, Session 8, will include a “graduation” party. You’ll also be awarded a certificate for the number of hours of this training you complete. *If appropriate for your group, show them an example of the certificate.* (See page 154.)

## 2 Seek feedback with the following questions:



Process questions

What do you think about what you've heard so far?

Do you have any questions or concerns about this group?



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## *Group Introductions and Guidelines*

### 1 Use the next 15–20 minutes for introductions and an overview of the group goals and guidelines.

**Begin by introducing yourself, then go around the room and ask each person to introduce himself. Also ask:**



Process questions

How long have you been with this program?

Are you currently in a relationship?

How long have you been with your partner?

What do you hope to get from this group?



Flip chart

### 2 Next, use the prepared flip chart to briefly review the *Group Goals*. Clarify goals, as needed, by emphasizing the following points:

**To strengthen recovery by improving our relationships.** We all deserve to find happiness and satisfaction in our relationships. Healthy, stable relationships are an anchor for recovery.

**To learn more about ourselves.** We improve relationships by learning more about ourselves and making important changes.

**To improve our health.** Our sexuality is an important part of our health. By learning more about it, we can lead healthier lives.

**To challenge insecurities and improve self-esteem.** Past failures and disappointments in relationships can shake confidence. Positive action toward change can help restore our sense of self worth.



Flip chart

### 3 **Conclude by using the prepared flip chart to briefly review the *Group Guidelines*. Explain the reasoning for each guideline and encourage questions:**

**Stick to the topic.** We'll be covering a lot of information, so it's important that we stay on track and avoid rambling around. As group leaders, we'll butt-in from time to time if the group starts drifting off the topic.

**Participate!** This workshop is a sharing process and we need everyone's attention and contributions to make it work. Stretch yourself a little bit and let us hear about your thoughts, feelings, and opinions.

**Respect ourselves and each other.** Let's avoid put-downs, one-ups, name-calling, and taking things too personally. We all deserve to be heard and we're all responsible for listening to others.

**What's said here, stays here!** Enough said. We will respect each person's confidentiality.

**Avoid bragging, boasting, and other mind-games.** This isn't a contest, and there will be no prizes awarded for bigger, better, more often, or being a ladies' man.

**Support each other!** We're all here to learn. We'll be discussing sensitive topics, but we're all on common ground as men. A little understanding can go a long way.



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## ***Challenging Stereotypes***

### 1 **For the next 20–25 minutes, help participants explore the impact of sexual and gender stereotypes on relationships. Here are some ideas to start the ball rolling:**

Growing up as a man or as a woman in our society leaves us all just a little bit confused. We are all swamped with myths, media images, and “ideals” of what a real man or woman is *supposed* to be like. Often, we maintain these fantasy ideals, and we compare and contrast ourselves and our sexual partners against these images. The result is that we are often left feeling inadequate, frightened, and confused. Because these stereotypes can impact our self-esteem and our expectations, they often create problems in relationships. One way to get beyond this problem is to identify the stereotypes and challenge them.



Let's start by generating a couple of lists of characteristics of the so-called "ideal" man and "ideal" woman so we can get a better understanding of what we're talking about.



Flip charts

**2 Use the prepared flip chart shells of *The Ideal Man* and *The Ideal Woman*. Lead the brainstorming activity by encouraging participants to call out the physical and personality characteristics of the "ideal" man and woman.** Do the "Ideal" man list first, then complete the "Ideal" woman list. Encourage participants to think about what they learned or observed as they grew up. Ask them to reflect on what they see and hear on TV, in movies, on MTV, and in music. When the lists are completed, tape or tack them to a wall so they can easily be seen.

**3 Process the activity by discussing some of the following questions:**



Process questions

**Where do these ideals come from?**

**How real are they in everyday life?**

**Was it easier to come up with physical or personality characteristics? What does that tell us?**

**What's different between the male and female lists?**

**Have you ever compared your partner to these so-called female ideals?**

**How do you think this comparison might make her feel?**

**Take a minute to honestly compare yourself against the so-called male ideals. How does this kind of comparison make you feel about yourself?**

**How can these comparisons cause problems in our relationships?**

**What can we do about it?**

**4 Wrap up the activity using some of the following ideas:**

The lists of characteristics we came up with are fairly typical, which just goes to show how widespread these sexual stereotypes really are. Whether we are consciously aware of it or not, we are influenced at some level.

It's been estimated we are exposed to over 50-thousand messages and bits of information each year through books, movies, TV, and music that reinforce gender and sexual stereotypes. These commercials, songs, plots, and scenes often deliver messages about how relationships are "suppose" to be, what kind of sex we are "suppose" to be having, and how the "ideal" man and woman are "suppose" to be thinking, feeling, and behaving. Next time you sit down to watch TV, watch critically for awhile and look for these messages. You're apt to see women who seem to only be concerned with how their hair looks, and men who fall to pieces when asked to iron a shirt. Ask yourself how fair or "real" these images really are.

Anyway you slice it, stereotypes are insulting to both men and women. Just remember that a lot of exposure to such ideas is bound to have some impact. After all, advertisers spend billions and billions each year to reach us with messages—because it works! The best way we can guard against being influenced is to develop a critical eye and ear for the messages society throws at us.

The most important thing we can do to create healthy relationships is to learn to value the "real" in each other, and leave the "ideal" to Hollywood.

- 5 Thank participants for their input.** ("You've done some good work on this issue—thanks.") Tell them the discussion will continue after a short stretch break.



## ***Break***



## ***Improving Relationships***

- 1 Use the next 30–35 minutes to help participants identify areas in their relationships they would like to improve.**

**Begin with a "mini-lecture" incorporating some of the following ideas:**

As we start to investigate the root of some of our concerns about relationships, intimacy, and sex we have to look closely at what we've learned from our society and from our culture. It's no wonder that

most of us have the same kinds of concerns and problems—we’ve all been influenced by many of the same messages about men and women. Many conflicts arise out of what our culture teaches us about the expected roles for men and women and how strongly we accept those roles. The so-called “ideal” man and woman lists we created before the break are a good example of those societal role expectations.

One idea we want you to think about in this group is that most of our attitudes, beliefs, and values about sexuality and relationships have been learned. We learn from our parents, other relatives, school, church, movies, TV, music, the working world, each other, and on the streets. It’s important to remember that attitudes or behaviors that we learned while growing up can be “unlearned” if we find they cause us relationship problems as adults.

Unfortunately, some of the stereotypical things we learned can set us up for “stormy” relationships with women—the so-called “battle of the sexes.” Even the concept that traditional sayings have helped us believe—that man is the opposite half of woman (and visa versa)—suggests that conflicts are somehow unavoidable because of the unchangeable “natures” of men and women. And whereas it’s obvious that men and women do have some differences (and some very nice differences, I might add), the truth is that we are not opposites. That’s something we learn—and what’s learned can be unlearned or re-learned.

It is possible to learn new ways of thinking about ourselves and women, and also to learn new skills for making our relationships more solid and happy. We don’t have to live in conflict. What we can do is look inside ourselves honestly and think about possible changes we can make. As men we can take the responsibility in our relationships and families to begin doing things differently, especially if what we’ve been doing and thinking all our lives hasn’t worked well.

Let’s take a minute to think seriously about setting some goals for making our relationships better. This involves thinking about what you need from your partner and what you are willing to give. If you are not currently in a relationship, you can think about what you would need from a prospective partner.



Worksheet,  
p. 13

## **2** **Distribute *A New Outlook on Relationships* worksheets, and ask each participant to read over the questions and answer them honestly.**

Encourage thoughtful reflection about the items in this exercise. Reassure participants that they will not have to hand in the worksheets or show them to anyone else in the group. Allow time to complete worksheets.

### 3 Process the activity by discussing some of the following questions:



Process questions

- Was it easy or hard to complete these sentences?
- What statement was the most difficult for you to complete?
- What did this exercise help you realize about yourself?
- How did you define love?
- What goal do you have for making your relationship better?
- How can you work on that goal?

### 4 Thank participants for their input (“Good work, guys!”) and provide closure by highlighting some of the key points raised during the session.

#### Here are some ideas for closing comments:

We’ve broken some important ground today toward making our relationships better. We’ve challenged some of the myths and stereotypes about the so-called “ideal” man and woman, and talked about how destructive these comparisons can be to our self-concepts and our relationships. The key to good relationships is to be “real,” not ideal, and to accept our partners as they really are, too.

We’ve also started the process of thinking about what we need in our relationships and what we are able to give to others. Next week, we’ll concentrate on improving some of our communication skills in relationships. In order to get what we need and give our partners what they need it’s important to be able to communicate in a way that helps avoid misunderstanding, anger, and hurt feelings. It can be done! We just have to work on developing the right skills.



### ***Homework: Partner Interview***

#### 1 Use the last 10 minutes to introduce the homework assignment. Remind participants about the purpose of the homework:

As we mentioned at the beginning of the session, we’re going to suggest a homework assignment each week for you to work on with your

partner. If you're not in a relationship, you might want to ask a friend or family member to work with you to give you another perspective.



Homework,  
p. 14

## **Distribute *Partner Interview* worksheets and provide the following instructions.**

The worksheet you're taking home is the same one you completed in the second half of the session. You'll need the one you completed for this assignment.

- ☑ Ask your partner to complete the homework worksheet and to answer the questions honestly.
- ☑ When she has finished, take turns reading your worksheets to each other, one statement at a time. Don't comment or question each other. Don't argue or debate. Just listen.
- ☑ When you've finished, spend a little time discussing the last question.
- ☑ Explore what each of you wants to improve most in your relationship and how you can work together to make it happen.

## **2 Thank participants for attending and invite them back next week.**



Evaluation,  
p. 15

## **3 Ask each person to complete an evaluation form before leaving.**

**Session 1**  
***A New Outlook on Relationships***  
**Worksheet**

**Complete these sentences based on your honest thoughts and feelings.**

The thing I need most from my partner is...

I feel loved when my partner...

The thing I like best about my partner is...

One thing I'd like to change about how I treat my partner is...

One thing I'd like my partner to change about how she treats me is...

The most important thing I give to my partner is...

I feel hurt when my partner...

I know I hurt my partner when I...

The thing my partner likes best about me is...

I show my partner I love her when I...

My definition of love is...

What I most want to improve in our relationship is...

**Session 1 Homework**  
***A New Outlook on Relationships***  
**Partner Interview**

**Ask your partner to complete these sentences based on her honest thoughts and feelings. When complete, share your answers from class with her as she shares her answers with you. This is an exercise toward beginning to communicate with each other. Avoid becoming defensive—just relax and listen to each other's thoughts and feelings. Spend some extra time talking about the last statement—how would you like to improve your relationship?**

The thing I need most from my partner is...

I feel loved when my partner...

The thing I like best about my partner is...

One thing I'd like to change about how I treat my partner is...

One thing I'd like my partner to change about how he treats me is...

The most important thing I give to my partner is...

I feel hurt when my partner...

I know I hurt my partner when I...

The thing my partner likes best about me is...

I show my partner I love him when I...

My definition of love is...

What I most want to improve in our relationship is...

**SESSION EVALUATION**  
***Time Out! For Men***

**Session 1**

**THIS BOX IS TO BE COMPLETED BY DATA COORDINATOR:**

SITE #  _ _  [1-2]	CLIENT ID#  _ _ _ _  [3-6]	DATE:  _ _   _ _   _ _  MO DAY YR [7-12]	COUNSELOR ID#  _ _  [13-14]
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**INSTRUCTIONS: Please take a minute to give us some feedback about how you liked this session.**

1. Use one word to describe your reaction to today’s class. \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is the most important thing you learned today?

3. What’s one positive change you plan to make in your relationship?

4. On a scale of 1 to 10, how do you rate today’s class? (Circle your rating)

01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	_ _  [15-16]
Poor			Pretty Good				Excellent			

5. Do you have any suggestions to help make this class better?