

PEER-TO-PEER ToT MODULE

TOPIC 1

GENDER-BASED STEREOTYPES AND THEIR IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S CHOICE OF PROFESSION

Information for peer-to-peer trainers

What is a stereotype?

A stereotype is a set of simplified generalisations about a group, which are taken to be real and genuine facts and influence others' attitudes towards the entire group or towards its individual members.

Stereotypes are amongst the most important schemes for acquiring orientation in a social environment. They can be generated on the basis of our own observations, but would more likely be the result of the influence of the significant others, such as family, friends, teachers and the media. Stereotypical thinking is a normal process, it is thinking in terms of 'categories', which helps us to sort out and simplify or to summarise the information we receive. However, stereotypical thinking can be charged with danger if we turn out incapable of differentiating the individuality of people and things.

Gender stereotypes are simplified and standardised concepts about feminine and masculine roles. They can be learned at home, at school or taken from the media. Stereotypes influence the manner in which people live, work and treat themselves and others, as well as the manner in which they are being treated by others. How an individual would find a way to fit in the existing stereotypes influences his/her self-esteem and his/her will for development and self-expression.

The expectations nurtured by people towards one or the other sex are acquired during childhood and adolescence, in the course of socialisation, when children witness the distribution of roles within the family; how girls and boys are rewarded at school when they commit to different activities. The media are yet another powerful formation tool for value-based attitudes, which strongly influence the perceptions of young people. All this has an inevitable impact on the educational and professional choices young people make. In most cases, their choice is limited by the existing attitudes to what a woman must or must not do; what a man must or must not do; what women can do and what men can do.

Overall, gender stereotypes depict women as caring and considerate, which, as a rule, ensures them with employment in care-related professions – for instance, as social workers, kindergarten teachers, medical nurses, etc. Men are perceived as leaders and professionals, whose minds are capable of grasping and solving various logical problems, which makes them suitable for the professions of an engineer, an architect, a computer programmer, etc.

The purpose of the suggested exercises is to let trainees find for themselves how gender-based stereotypes can influence professional choices and discuss the consequences of such influence.

Peer-to-peer exercises

Version No. 1

Exercise duration: 40 minutes

Required materials: posters; markers

Exercise description:

1. Trainees split into small groups (5-6 people per group).
2. Each group receives a poster separated in three columns. The text: „Acts as a man” or „Acts as a woman” will be written in the upper part of the middle column (some groups will receive a poster saying „Acts as a man”, while others will get an “Acts-as-a-woman” copy). In this column trainees will make a list of what it means to act as a man or as a woman.
3. In the left column, trainees will write what people might say or do if anyone was not acting as a man or as a woman, as specified in the middle column. This part of the activity might invoke the use of words and expressions on the verge of hate speech, which is why the trainers might need to establish a no-hate-speech rule and ban the use of obscene words.
4. In the right-hand column, trainees list the professions, which they would choose if they had to act in line with the descriptions in the middle column.
5. The groups work for 15 minutes, after which they have 5 minutes more to make group comments of the lists they compiled.
6. Group speakers present the output of the smaller groups to the whole class.
7. After all group work is presented, trainers encourage a discussion amongst their peers.

Questions for discussion:

- Do any gender stereotypes transpire in the group work?
- What feminine and masculine stereotypes can be derived from the lists of the groups?

- How and where do we learn about the roles of men and women?
 - What is one or the other sex expected to do?
 - Do these roles and perceptions of 'masculine' and 'feminine' behaviour restrict us in our choices of life activity and profession or do they help us in these choices?
 - Did any of the participants in the training ever make a choice other than the choices pertaining to their sex with regard to education, hobbies, leisure activities, a dreamed profession? Did any consequences ensue from their choice and what?
 - Do trainees know of any people who had defied gender stereotypes and confronted them by action (choice of profession)?
8. Trainers summarise that stereotypes impact the manner in which people live, work and treat themselves and others, as well as the manner in which they are being treated by others. On numerous occasions gender stereotypes have a negative impact on the assessment of one's own capabilities because they subconsciously pre-programme our minds about what we must and mustn't do, depending on whether we are girls or boys, women or men. However, this limits our freedom to choose what to study and where to work, and how to develop on a personal plane. The bravery to challenge the expectations attributed to our sex and to follow our hearts and dreams may result in certain inconveniences, but it will certainly bring a much greater satisfaction and joy of what we can achieve.

Version No. 2

Exercise duration: 40 minutes

Required materials: copies of the *List of Professions* (as necessary), posters, markers

Exercise description:

1. Each trainee receives a copy of the *List of Professions* where they note if the respective profession is suitable for males, for females or for both sexes by circling the right answer. Working time is 10 minutes.
2. After the work on the *List* is completed, the trainers invite their peers to share what they've circled in it. While they are sharing, on a poster containing the same list, information is input about the number of times each profession was marked as 'feminine', 'masculine' or 'suitable for both sexes'.
3. The trainers summarise which professions have scored highest in terms of their 'suitability' for males or females only, or for both sexes.
4. Trainers invite their peers to discuss the results.

Questions for discussion:

- Why have these professions... (listed according to their ranking) scored as suitable for males or females, or for both sexes? Please provide supporting arguments!
- Which professions are related to care and involve working with people? Whom are they most suitable for, according to the list: men or women?
- Which jobs are related to technical work or technologies? Whom are they most suitable for, according to the list: men or women?
- Which professions enjoy a higher status and how many of them have been marked as suitable for men or for women?
- Which professions would potentially get a higher pay? How many of them have been marked as suitable for men or for women?
- Which professions require a better education (a higher degree of education)? How many of them have been marked as suitable for men or for women?
- Are „men” or „women” allowed a wider choice of professions according to the list? What is the reason for this result? Are there any circumstances of life, which impact the results? Are there subjective reasons for both men and women, which predetermine the suitability of the professions on the list for one sex primarily?
- Why are certain professions traditionally described as „feminine”, and others – as „masculine”?

LIST OF PROFESSIONS

Circle the answer, based on the suitability of professions
for women, for men or for both sexes

PROFESSION	SEX		
	F	M	Both sexes
IT specialist	F	M	Both sexes
Primary school teacher	F	M	Both sexes
Construction engineer	F	M	Both sexes
Scientific worker	F	M	Both sexes
Fashion designer	F	M	Both sexes
Banker	F	M	Both sexes
Bank cashier	F	M	Both sexes
Nutritionist	F	M	Both sexes
Mechanical engineer	F	M	Both sexes
Social worker	F	M	Both sexes
Librarian	F	M	Both sexes
Speech therapist	F	M	Both sexes
Nursery school teacher	F	M	Both sexes
Nurse	F	M	Both sexes
Driving instructor	F	M	Both sexes
Software engineer	F	M	Both sexes
Computer hardware engineer	F	M	Both sexes
Software architect	F	M	Both sexes
Architect	F	M	Both sexes
Financial analyst	F	M	Both sexes
Sports journalist	F	M	Both sexes
Philologist	F	M	Both sexes
Dental assistant	F	M	Both sexes

At the end of the discussion, peer trainers summarise that gender stereotypes inevitably influence the choices we make, including the choice of profession. Skills, however, are not gender-specific, this is why all professions, especially those requiring intellectual abilities, are suitable for both women and men. It is young people’s personal judgement, which steers them in the preferred direction.