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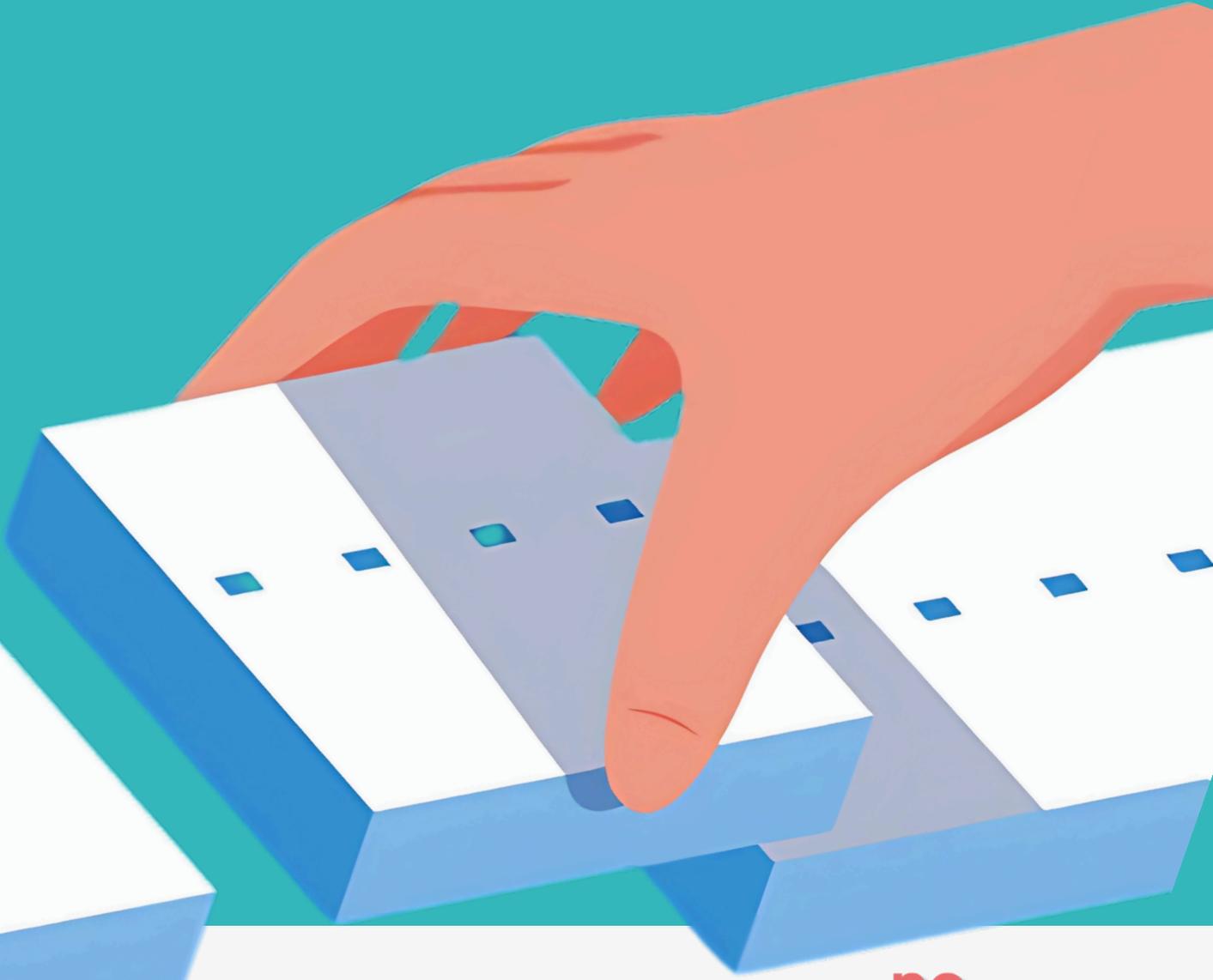
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Gender & Roles stereotypes

no gender gap

Theory and definition

For a deep understanding of gender dynamics in society, it is crucial to distinguish and define **gender roles** and **gender stereotypes.** Both concepts, though interconnected, describe different facets of how societal expectations influence individuals' perceptions and behaviors.

Gender roles refer to the behaviors, tasks, and responsibilities that a specific society expects individuals to assume or perform based on their gender. For example, traditionally, men have been expected to be the main providers and protectors of the household, while women have been assigned the role of caregivers and domestic task managers. It is important to recognize that these roles are not static; they evolve significantly over time and vary across different cultures and social contexts, adapting to changes in modern society.

On the other hand, **gender stereotypes** are simplified and preconceived ideas, or overgeneralizations, about the attributes, characteristics, behaviors, that women and men are believed to possess or should possess and perform. They constitute rigid assumptions about an entire group of people based solely on their gender. These stereotypes are created and reinforced by dominant gender norms and can lead to biased judgments and discrimination against individuals who do not conform to these pre-established expectations. Although some stereotypes may seem "positive," they all tend to fit into inflexible ideas about what it means to be "masculine" or "feminine," limiting individual expression and potential. For example, the stereotype that "men are strong and unemotional" or that "women are naturally caring and sensitive" restricts people's freedom to express themselves authentically.

Both gender roles and stereotypes can be detrimental, as they curtail individuals' freedom to choose their own paths in life, based on their personal interests, talents, and aspirations, rather than being limited

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by outdated or imposed expectations. Over time, many societies have undertaken significant efforts to challenge and dismantle these stereotypes, in order to foster greater equality and freedom for all gender identities.

Theoretical foundations of gender roles and stereotypes

The understanding of gender roles is deeply linked to the concept of **heteronormativity**.

Heteronormativity describes a hegemonic social norm that justifies the existence of a binary gender (only male and female) as biological, assigning gender based on physical characteristics at birth. Within this ideology, heterosexuality (exclusive sexual attraction between men and women) is defined as the natural and expected orientation.

While gender roles may still be relevant or informative in many lives, they can also have a detrimental impact on other individuals, especially those who do not fit binary expectations. Challenging and dismantling these roles is a crucial step towards improving the ability of **LGBTIQA+** individuals (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual individuals, as well as other gender dentities and sexual

minorities) to navigate the world with freedom and safety, and to move towards a more progressive and inclusive future.

The heteronormative ideology is based on the belief that there are two distinct and mutually exclusive genders, and that attraction between them is the only "natural" or "correct" one. This leads to the invisibilization and marginalization of any gender identity or sexual orientation that does not conform to this norm. By challenging gender roles and stereotypes, this binary view is directly questioned, and spaces are opened for the recognition and celebration of human diversity in all its forms.

Women, girls, and LGBTIQA+ identities suffer the majority of the negative impacts of rigid and traditional gender norms, roles, and stereotypes.

They are more likely to experience restrictions on their freedom and mobility, and epidemic levels of violence and harassment, meaning they have fewer opportunities to choose how to live their lives.

The gender stereotypes we hold towards boys and men also influence this.

Stereotypical ideas and negative masculinities about what it means to be a "man" can encourage boys and men to perpetuate this cycle of discrimination and inequality.

How gender roles affect society

Gender roles affect society in profound and complex ways. While they can provide a sense of structure and order, they also limit individual potential, reinforce inequality, and perpetuate discriminatory practices. Over time, challenging and redefining these roles can help foster a more equitable society where individuals are free to express themselves and pursue opportunities without being limited by traditional gender expectations.

Gender roles significantly impact society by creating and reinforcing stereotypes that can limit people's potential and opportunities based on their gender. For example:

- **Influence on career choices:** Guiding men and women towards certain professions, which often results in gender pay gaps and occupational segregation.
- **Affecting mental Health:** Contributing to mental health issues when people feel pressured to conform to restrictive roles that do not align with their personal identity.
- **Shaping social interactions:** Dictating the dynamics of personal relationships, often leading to power imbalances and inequality.

It is also important to mention the concept of **stereotype internalization,** which means the psychological process by which individuals come to accept and incorporate negative stereotypes about their own social group into their self-concept or identity. This means they begin to believe, consciously or unconsciously, that the negative things society says about their group (based on race, gender, age, disability, etc.) are true about themselves. For example: a girl who repeatedly hears the stereotype that "girls are not good at math" might start to believe that she is inherently bad at math, even if she is capable. This reinforces social inequality by limiting individuals' sense of possibility.

Key subtopics related to gender roles and stereotypes

To understand the omnipresence of gender roles and stereotypes, it is essential to analyze their manifestation in various spheres of life. Each of these areas contributes to a comprehensive view of how these social constructs are formed, perpetuated, and affect individuals.

Gender Roles in Childhood:

Relationship: From an early age, boys and girls are socialized with specific expectations based on their gender. This is observed in the toys they are offered (trucks and sports for boys, dolls and care activities for girls) and in the behaviors they are encouraged or discouraged from. These initial messages, transmitted by family, school, and media, shape their future interests and behaviors, often limiting their full development.

Contribution: This subtopic highlights the early socialization process and how gender stereotypes are introduced and reinforced from childhood. It emphasizes the long-term effects of these early experiences on individuals' self-concept and future choices.

Key Subtopic

Gender stereotypes in the workplace:

Relationship: Stereotypes persist in most industries, dictating which jobs are "appropriate" for men and women. This is manifested in the orientation of women towards care or administrative roles, and men towards leadership or technical positions. This creates barriers to professional advancement, wagegaps, and limits diversity in management positions.

Contribution: This subtopic directly connects to how gender stereotypes manifest in professional settings. It demonstrates how societal expectations around gender influence career choices, wage disparity, leadership opportunities, and the perpetuation of gender-based work roles. By focusing on the workplace, it shows the real impact of gender stereotypes on financial and professional outcomes.

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Media representation and gender stereotypes:

Relationship: Films, television shows, advertisements, and other media often reinforce traditional gender roles. Women may be portrayed as caregivers or dependents, while men are shown as strong, decisive, or heroic. These representations shape public perception of how men and women "should be," influencing their behaviors and how they are treated in real life.

Contribution: Media plays a powerful role in perpetuating or challenging gender stereotypes. Exploring how media reinforces traditional ideas of masculinity and femininity, influencing social expectations and individual behavior, shows how media representations shape gender perceptions and impact real-life behaviors and attitudes.

Key Subtopic

Impact of gender stereotypes on mental health:

Relationship: Pressure to conform to rigid gender expectations can affect mental health. Men may feel the need to be impassive and avoid showing emotions, which can lead to problems like depression or anxiety. Women, on the other hand, may feel the burden of trying to balance career and caregiving roles, leading to stress or burnout. These stereotypes can hinder emotional expression and overall well-being.

Contribution: This subtopic directly links gender stereotypes to emotional and psychological well-being. It contributes to the main topic by showing how pressure to conform to gender roles can lead to mental health struggles, such as anxiety, depression, and stress. It emphasizes the damaging effects of rigid gender norms on individuals' self-esteem and overall mental health.

Gender stereotypes in education:

Relationship: Gender biases in education often influence how teachers and peers treat boys and girls. Boys may be praised for being assertive, while girls may be encouraged to be quiet or nurturing. Stereotypes can also affect subject choices, with boys more likely to be encouraged to pursue math and science, while girls are often pushed towards arts or humanities.

Contribution: Education is a primary institution where gender stereotypes are formed and perpetuated. This subtopic highlights how gender biases in schools influence academic performance, career aspirations, and subject choices. It contributes by illustrating how early academic experiences can reinforce gender expectations, affecting long-term opportunities and personal development.

Key Subtopic

Intersectionality and gender roles:

Relationship: This concept highlights how gender intersects with other social categories such as race, social class, and sexuality. For example, a Black woman may experience racial and gender stereotypes that affect her opportunities and experiences in different ways than a white woman. Intersectionality emphasizes that gender roles are not universal and can aggravate discrimination based on other identities.
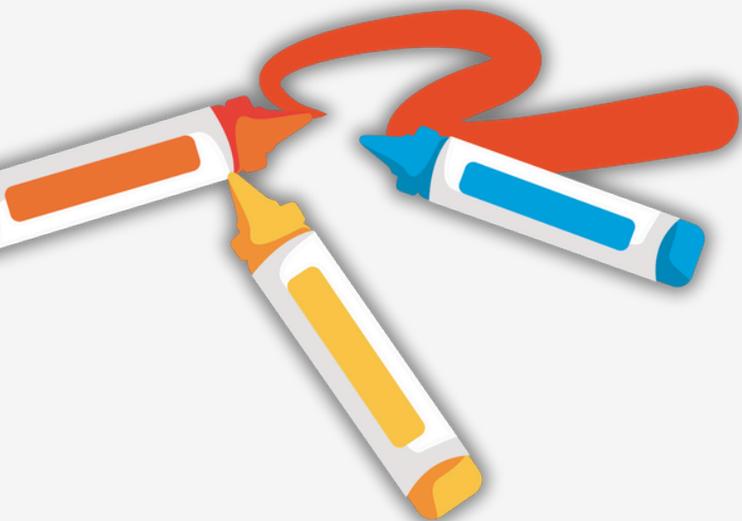
Contribution: Intersectionality adds depth to the conversation by showing that gender roles are experienced differently based on a person's race, class, and other identities. It contributes by emphasizing that gender stereotypes are not monolithic and must be understood in a more nuanced way, considering the multiple factors that shape an individual's gender experience.

In summary, all these subtopics contribute to the broader discussion on gender roles and stereotypes by focusing on different angles: how they are formed, perpetuated, and resisted across cultures, professions, media, education, and personal lives. They help illustrate the pervasive and multifaceted nature of gender expectations, the impacts on people's development, and the need for systemic change to address these harmful stereotypes. Each subtopic brings its own insights into how gender norms shape opportunities, behaviors, and identities in complex ways.
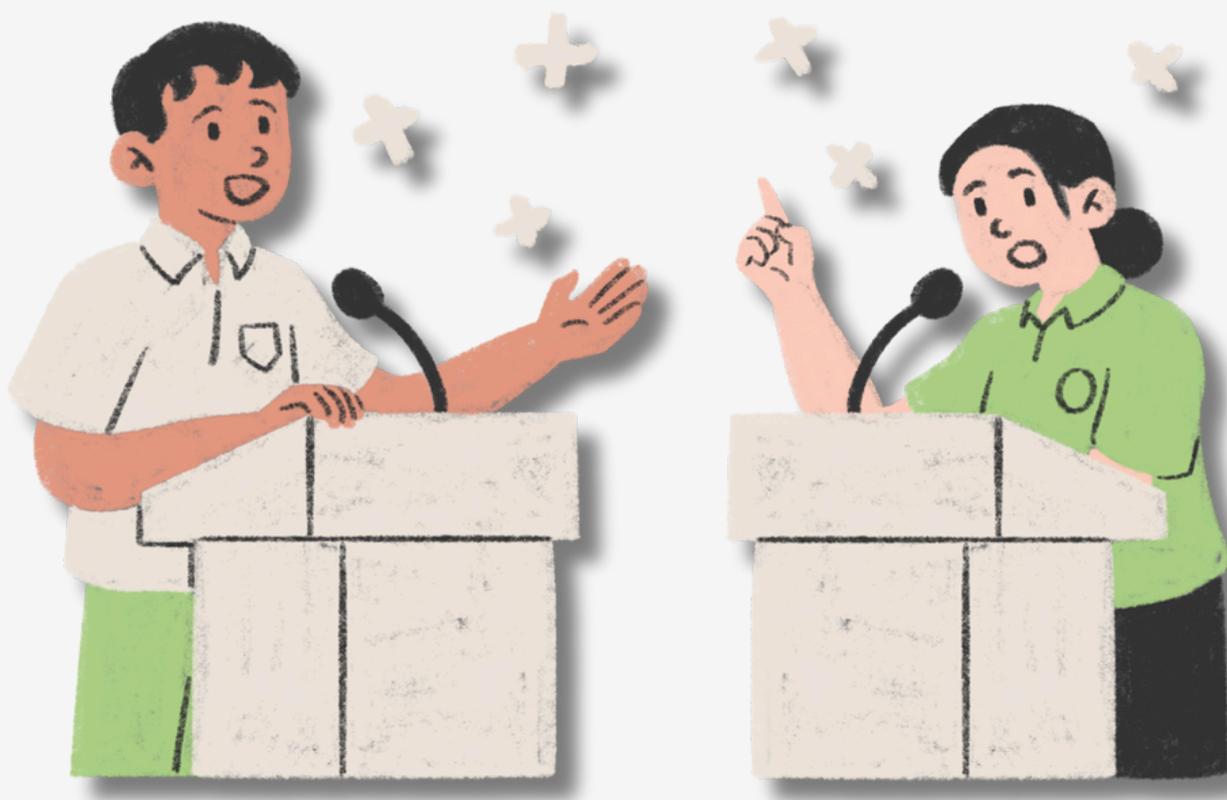
NON-FORMAL EDUCATION (NFE) ACTIVITIES

Here are several non-formal education activities designed for youth workers to explore the concepts of the gender roles with young people in a participatory and reflective way.
Each activity is detailed to facilitate its implementation.

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Ways to challenge gender stereotypes

Duration: 60-90 minutes.

ACTIVITY 1

✳ **Objectives:**

Identify concrete actions to challenge gender stereotypes in daily life.

Understand how stereotypes are harmful to the LGBTIQA+ community.

Encourage critique and rejection of rigid gender roles, promoting personal identities not limited by stereotypes.

✳ **Materials and resources:** Paper, pens.

Number of participants:
15 to 30 participants.

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1

Introduction (5 minutes): The facilitator introduces the topic of gender stereotypes and their impact. It can start with a general question like: "What gender stereotypes are you aware of?" or "How do you think gender stereotypes affect our lives?".

2

Main activity (45-75 minutes):

Guiding questions: The following questions are posed to the participants:

- "What actions can you, individually, take to challenge gender stereotypes in your daily life?"
- "What actions can we take as citizens to challenge gender stereotypes in our community?"
- "What actions could local authorities or governments take to challenge gender stereotypes at a systemic level?"

Small group work: Participants are divided into small groups (4 to 6 people). Each group discusses the posed questions and develops a proposal of actions for each context (individual, citizen, institutional). They are encouraged to think creatively and consider the impact of stereotypes on the LGBTIQA+ community.

Plenary sharing and group discussion: After sufficient time, groups gather in the plenary. Each group presents its proposed actions. The facilitator moderates a debate, encouraging discussion about the feasibility, impact, and importance of each action. Deeper discussion can be had on how stereotypes affect the LGBTIQA+ community and how the proposed actions can help mitigate those impacts.

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3

Conclusion (5 minutes): The facilitator summarizes the main ideas and actions discussed, emphasizing the importance of individual and collective action to dismantle gender stereotypes and foster a more equitable society. Thanks are extended to the young people for their participation and commitment.

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Gender lessons in fairy tales

Duration: 60-90 minutes.

ACTIVITY 2

✳ **Materials and resources:** Flipcharts, pens, white sheets of paper.

Number of participants: 10 to 30 participants.

✳ **Objectives:**

Raise awareness about gender stereotypes present in fairy tales and children's narratives.

Reflect on how these stereotypes influence young people's development and their view of themselves and society.

1

Introduction (5 minutes): The facilitator explains that the activity will explore the fairy tales participants grew up with. A brainstorm is initiated to collect a list of popular fairy tales on a flipchart. Then, participants are divided into groups of 4-5 people. Each group chooses a fairy tale to work with (ensuring no more than one group works with the same tale).

2

Main activity (50-80 minutes):

Part 1 - Analysis (30-45 minutes): Groups return to their spaces and, on a flipchart, create three columns:

- Characteristics/adjectives to describe the male characters in the story.
- Characteristics/adjectives to describe the female characters in the story.
- Characteristics/adjectives to describe the characters in the story who are non-binary or whose gender is not clearly assigned (if any). After approximately 20 minutes, groups return to the plenary. Each group presents its conclusions, and a discussion is opened about how these stereotypes influence children and young people in their development and in their views of themselves and the society around them.

2

Part 2 - Rewriting stereotypes (20-35 minutes):

Groups return to their spaces and, using a simple white sheet of paper, are tasked with rewriting the same story, but this time with stereotypes inverted or completely broken. They are encouraged to be creative and imagine what the story would be like if the characters defied traditional gender expectations. After about 15 minutes, groups gather again in the plenary to read their new versions of the tales.

3

Conclusion (5 minutes): The facilitator thanks the participants for their stories and reflections. The power of narratives in shaping ideas is highlighted, and how rewriting can be a tool for social change and breaking stereotypes.

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Gender self-reflection

Duration: 60-75 minutes.

ACTIVITY 3

✳ Objectives:

Promote reflection on personal experience in relation to gender, gender roles, and "doing gender" in daily life and in youth activities.

Generate awareness of different gender-related experiences.

Reflect on how gender roles are handled and how one acts in group activities in relation to "gendered" tasks.

✳ Materials and resources: Printed self-reflection questionnaires (see below), enough space for each pair to have privacy.

Number of participants: Open (the activity adapts to any group size by working in pairs).

Important considerations: It is recommended that the group knows each other somewhat and that each participant feels comfortable sharing personal stories with at least one person. The methodology may lead to some people "coming out" to their conversation partner. This activity can bring sensitive memories to the surface, so there should be space and time for people to have a moment to themselves shortly afterwards.

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1

Introduction (5 minutes): The facilitator introduces the concept of self-reflection. Explains that participants will pair up with someone they feel comfortable with. It is mentioned that gender diversity in pairs can be very interesting for discussion. It is crucial to emphasize that participants should keep what their partner tells them private. Then, the facilitator distributes the self-reflection questionnaires (see 1. Gender and I, 2. Doing gender in daily life, 3. Doing gender in youth projects).

2

Main activity (40-60 minutes): Participants can go anywhere they wish to reflect on the questions and share their answers with their partner. They are given a set time to return. The facilitator can choose to use all or only some questions from the three questionnaires.

3

Plenary sharing and reflection (10 minutes): The group gathers again in the plenary. The facilitator asks participants how the self-reflection was for them and how they feel afterward. It is important to ensure that participants do not overshare details of their private conversations and that no one feels pressured to share if they do not wish to.

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4

Closing (5 minutes): The facilitator concludes the activity, assuring participants that they will be available for some time in case anyone wishes to share anything additional or needs support.

You will find the questionnaires on the next page!

Self-reflection questionnaires:

Gender and i (20 min)

Take a few minutes to answer the following questions individually. Then, take some time to talk about your answers. You decide how much you want to share with the other person.

What does it mean for you to be a man*, woman*, non-binary*, ...?

_____

_____

What image of being a woman or being a man accompanies you in your daily life?

_____

_____

What advantages or disadvantages do you have due to your assigned gender?

_____

_____

Do you feel you have to act a certain way because of your gender?

_____

_____

What happens when you don't act that way?

_____

_____

What bothers you about others' behavior regarding gender?

_____

_____

Self-reflection questionnaires:

Doing gender in daily life (20 min)

The goal is not to answer all or many questions. Choose 2 to 4 questions you would like to talk about. Take a few minutes to think about each question individually and then share in the small group.

How do you talk about men* / women*?

_____

_____

To what extent do you judge them by their appearance, their success, their strength, their sexual partners, their intelligence...?

_____

_____

What topics do you talk about with friends of the same gender? What topics with friends of other genders?

_____

_____

Have you ever told a person of another gender that you should or could do a task instead of them? What was the task? How did you / the other person react?

_____

_____

What tasks do you consider important at home?

_____

_____

Which ones are rather unimportant? Which ones do you usually take on? For which tasks do you make others aware that you have done them?

_____

_____

Do you think about whether you can sleep with different partners and what others think about it? Have you ever heard people judge such a situation? What was the "problem"?
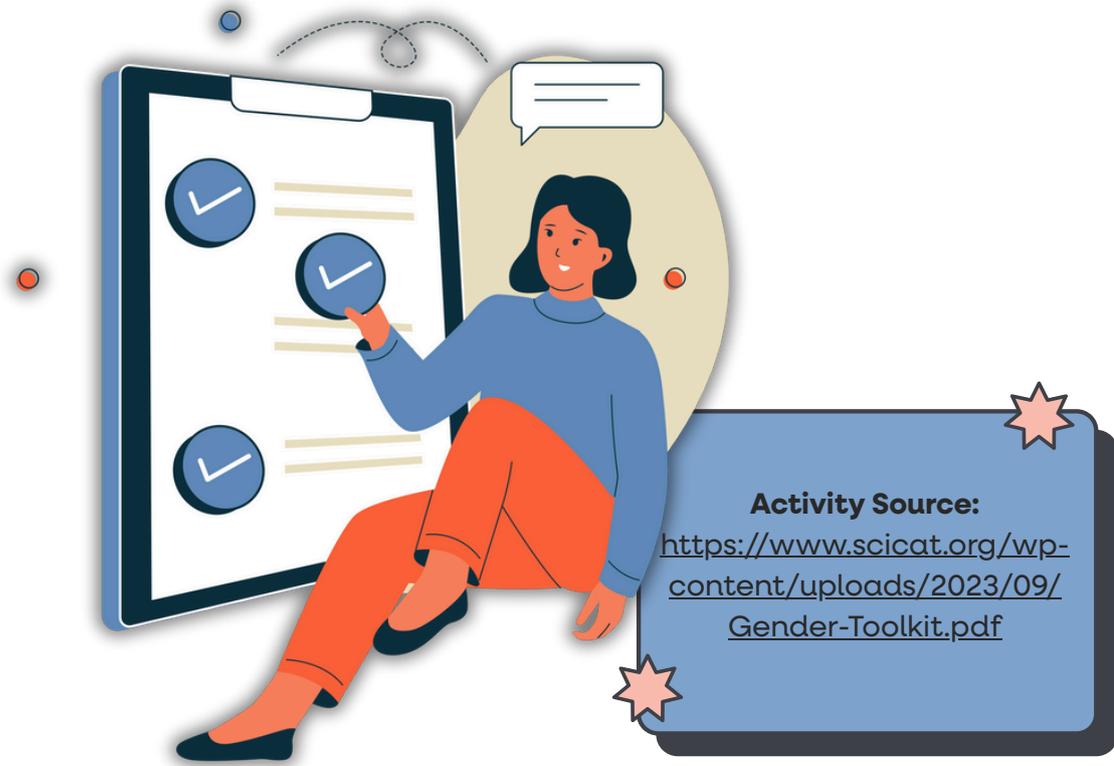
_____

_____

Do you sometimes feel judged by your clothes? In what situations do you think beforehand what to wear? Why?

_____

_____

Doing gender in youth projects (20 min)

The goal is not to answer all or many questions. Choose 2 to 4 questions you would like to talk about. Take a few minutes to think about each question individually and then share in a small group.

What tasks do you perform when you are part of a seminar? Moderating discussions, designing flipcharts, writing minutes, washing dishes, moving tables…?

_____

_____

How much do you speak in group discussions? Can you always speak when you want to?

_____

_____

Activity Source:
https://www.scicat.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Gender-Toolkit.pdf

Resources

The resources presented here are in English to ensure global accessibility and offer valuable perspectives for training and practice.

Books

"Americanah" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

This powerful novel explores themes of identity, race, and immigration through the story of Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman who moves to America for university. As she navigates life in America, Ifemelu confronts the complexities of being a Black woman in a foreign country and starts a popular blog about race and culture. The novel travels between Nigeria, the US, and the UK, culminating with Ifemelu's return to Nigeria, where she must reconcile her past and present. While not exclusively focused on gender, its exploration of identity and societal expectations offers relevant insights.
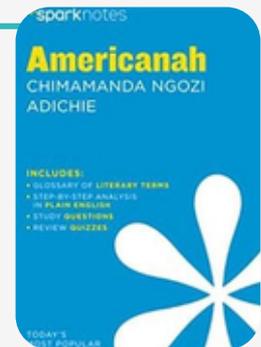
"The gendered brain" by Gina Rippon.

In this book, cognitive neuroscientist Gina Rippon debunks the myth of a "male" and "female" brain. She uses scientific evidence to show how social conditioning—not biology—shapes gender-related behavior and cognitive differences. It challenges deeply ingrained stereotypes and presents a compelling argument against biological determinism in gender roles.
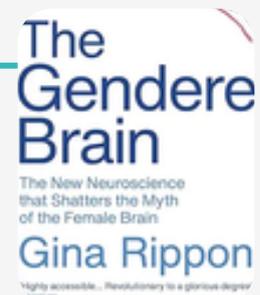
"Delusions of gender" by Cordelia Fine.

In this work, Cordelia Fine examines how cultural beliefs and flawed science reinforce gender stereotypes, particularly around intelligence, emotions, and behavior. It's a witty, accessible, and evidence-based book, perfect for readers who want to dismantle the pseudoscience behind gender norms.
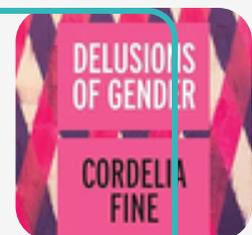
Videos

"Miss representation" (2011) – Documentary by Jennifer Siebel Newsom.

This documentary examines how mainstream media contributes to the underrepresentation of women in positions of power and influence in the United States. It highlights the impact of media gender stereotypes on both women and men, criticizing societal expectations and media portrayals that shape gender roles from an early age.

"The mask you live In" (2015) – Documentary by Jennifer Siebel Newsom.

Considered a complementary piece to "Miss Representation," this film explores how boys are socialized to conform to narrow definitions of masculinity and how this affects their emotional development and relationships. It delves into male gender roles and how stereotypes can lead to emotional repression and harmful behaviors.

Articles

"AI has a stereotypical view of what men around the world look like – and the US depiction is shameful" (New York Post).

This recent article examines how artificial intelligence generates stereotypical representations of men from different countries, raising a debate about the accuracy and fairness of these stereotypes. It highlights how cultural generalizations and inaccuracies can be problematic, illustrating both the potential and pitfalls of AI in representing global identities. Available at: https://nypost.com/2025/05/05/tech/heres-what-ai-thinks-american-men-look-like-its-embarrassing/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

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Podcast

"Brown don't frown".

This podcast was born out of a personal journey with womanhood. As a British Bangladeshi woman, navigating mainstream feminism often felt exclusionary because it didn't seem to value the experiences or viewpoints that shaped her grandmother's, aunts', mother's, or friends' lives. Through this podcast, the aim is to build a more inclusive discourse, one that breaks down assumptions about different cultures and shines a positive light on the stories of underrepresented women.

"Call me mother".

Author and journalist Shon Faye talks to leading LGBTIQA+ figures who have something important, interesting, or illuminating to say about what it means to be queer in the world today. Through these conversations, "Call Me Mother" aims to deepen our understanding of queer experiences through the life stories of the elders who have lived them before us, and to show that everyone, queer or not, belongs to a much broader history.
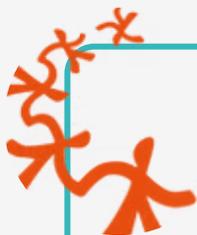
Key Organizations

These global organizations are fundamental for promoting gender equality and deconstructing roles and stereotypes, offering valuable resources and support:

UN Women:
It is the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women globally. It actively works on formulating public policies, promoting women's political participation, eradicating gender-based violence, and defending women's rights in all spheres.
Website: https://www.unwomen.org/en

Promundo:
A global organization that works to promote positive masculinity and redefine traditional male gender roles. It focuses on engaging men and boys in the fight for gender equality.
Website: https://www.promundo.org.br/en

Lean in:
Founded by Sheryl Sandberg, this organization supports women in leadership positions and challenges gender biases in the professional sphere. It provides resources and networks to empower women in the workplace.
Website: https://leanin.org/

The representation project:
This organization uses film and media to challenge stereotypes related to gender, race, and sexuality in mainstream media. Its work seeks to make visible and question harmful media representations that perpetuate gender roles.
Website: https://therepproject.org/

Glossary of key terms:

For clear understanding and common language, the essential terms of this module are presented:

Heteronormativity: The belief or assumption that heterosexuality (sexual attraction between people of the opposite sex) is the only natural, normal, or preferred sexual orientation. It often also assumes traditional gender roles, where people are expected to conform to binary categories of male and female and engage in relationships that fit a male-female dynamic.

Gender roles: Societal and cultural expectations about how people should behave, dress, and present themselves based on their perceived or assigned gender (e.g., women as caregivers, men as providers).

Gender stereotypes: Generalized beliefs about traits, behaviors, or roles that society attributes to people based on their gender (e.g., "women are emotional," "men don't cry").

Masculinity: The set of attributes, behaviors, and roles typically associated with boys and men. These can be socially constructed and vary across cultures and over time.

Gender expectations: Presumptions about how people should act, feel, or think based on their gender, often shaping career choices, hobbies, or emotional expression.

Gender bias: Preferential treatment or discrimination against individuals based on their gender, often favoring one gender over others in the workplace, media, or education.

Gender policing: The act of enforcing traditional gender norms and punishing or shaming those who deviate from them (e.g., criticizing a boy for wearing makeup)

Gender socialization: The process by which individuals learn cultural norms and expected behaviors for their gender from early childhood, through family, education, media, and peers.

Gender binary: The classification of gender into two distinct and opposing categories (male and female), often ignoring or invalidating non-binary or gender-diverse identities.

Gender pay gap: The average difference in earnings between women and men, often due to systemic discrimination, occupational segregation, and unequal care responsibilities.

Media representation: How people or groups are portrayed in media, which can influence public perceptions. In the context of gender, it includes visibility, accuracy, and diversity of gender identities and roles.

Non-binary erasure: The tendency to ignore, dismiss, or invalidate non-binary identities in culture, language, policy, and media, reinforcing the gender binary.

Sexual double standard: The practice of applying different moral judgments to the same sexual behavior depending on a person's gender (e.g., men praised for promiscuity, women shamed for the same).

Glass ceiling: An invisible yet difficult-to-overcome barrier that prevents women and marginalized genders from ascending to higher positions of power or leadership, despite their qualifications or achievements.

Intersectionality: A framework that recognizes how different aspects of identity (such as gender, race, social class, sexuality) intersect to shape experiences of oppression and privilege.

THANK YOU!

This document was drafted with the participation of :

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