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**Growing Up
Equal**



SAMPLE EXERCISES TO PROVOKE DISCUSSION ON GENDER ISSUES

AMONG STUDENTS FROM 3–4 GRADE



WORKSHOP
FOR CIVIC
INITIATIVES
FOUNDATION



Exercise 1

What is it to be a girl and what is it to be a boy

Contents

Reflection exercise on social norms and stereotypes of what a girl/woman is and what a boy/man is, their bio-social roles, and stereotypes about them. The exercise involves group work and spontaneous discussion on norms and stereotypes of women and men.

Purpose of the exercise

Students reflect on the norms for women and men that exist in society regarding appearance, behavior, and expectations regarding how to express one's gender. From an early age, people acquire static notions regarding existing gender norms and expectations that shape their understandings of what is a woman and what is a man. "The extent to which a man will become masculine and a woman feminine depends on the process of learning the respective gender roles accepted in a particular society.¹ Reflecting on stereotypes of "woman" and "man", students develop their ability to analyse and understand how societal expectations influence the formation of individual attitudes.

¹ Assoc. Prof. Peter Neshev, *Gender Roles and Gender Identity as a Problem in Psychology*, <https://ejournal.vfu.bg/bg/psychology.html>



Time required

45 minutes

Materials and space required

- Board (for writing)
- Classroom with enough space so that students can move freely
- List of adjectives, pre-printed by the teacher

Instructions

1. Introduce the exercise

Explain to students that the exercise is designed to explore societal expectations of what it means to be a girl/boy. The question the class will try to answer is: What is expected of a girl/boy, what is perceived as feminine and what is perceived as masculine?

2. Students reflect on the perceptions (stereotypes) of a girl/boy and express their opinion.

Start by dividing the classroom into two symbol spaces – one for expectations of boys and one for expectations of girls. Read aloud a concept from *Appendix 1*, such as “courage,” and ask to whom it is most often related: a girl or a boy? Make students take one of the two places they choose, depending on which gender they relate the noun “courage” to. Do the same with the other nouns.

in Appendix 1. Draw students’ attention to the fact that their decision should *be based on societal expectations and understandings of what is inherent in girls and boys*, not on what girls and boys are really like. Also ask them not to talk during this exercise.



3. Spontaneous discussion

Divide the board into two: “Expectations for boys” and “Expectations for girls”. Write in the appropriate column the words that, according to the students’ positioning, have been identified as expectations for one and the other. If the positioning was not unambiguous, write an approximate percentage in each column. Continue with spontaneous ideas from students, where they should list additional adjectives related to behaviour and appearance that are not on the list in Appendix 1. They do not have to agree completely with each other to uniquely categorise a noun.

Expectations for boys:	Expectations for girls:

After this spontaneous exchange you may ask questions such as:

- Do you think that the social expectations listed also affect us? How?
- Could the qualities listed be considered as an ideal for a boy or girl?
- Do we judge the people we meet by these qualities?
- Is it possible to meet all the expectations set for boys or girls respectively?
- Are boys and girls really like that?
- If you don't meet the social expectations for a girl or a boy, what are the usual consequences?

4. Complete the exercise with conclusions on the following questions:

- What are the benefits of conforming to social expectations relative to your gender?
- What are the negatives of not meeting the relevant expectations? For example: if a girl is strong and a boy too sensitive?

(Use the words from Appendix 1)

Advice to the teacher

Point out to students that not conforming to gender expectations and norms can lead to teasing, insulting epithets and nicknames, strange looks, hatred and even violence.

Also draw their attention to the fact that the words listed, and their correlation as masculine/feminine qualities, represent a stereotypical notion that does not match reality, but often impacts us and the way we perceive others, even without realizing it.

Annex 1:

List of qualities

Courage, Beauty, Strength, Endurance, Patience, Ambition, Intelligence, Perseverance, Attractiveness, Affection, Quickness, Activity, Passivity, Support, Elegance, Aggressiveness, Recklessness, Shyness, Attentiveness, Malice, Tirelessness, Caring, Gentleness, Thoughtfulness, Independence, Mercy, Kindness, Sensitivity, Generosity.

Exercise 2

Notable Bulgarian Women

Contents

An exercise to reflect on what qualities some notable women who have left a vivid mark on Bulgarian history or culture/sport possess. The exercise involves dividing the class into small mixed groups (boys and girls) and giving each group a printed example of a historical figure; small group discussion, presentation of the group's findings to the class, followed by a general class discussion and conclusion.

Purpose of the exercise

Students will reflect on historical and/or cultural examples of women whose actions have violated societal expectations assigned to their gender. Reflecting on the examples, students should think about when the person lived, what society's expectations of women were in that era, what exactly the notable historical figure did, and how violating society's perceptions of women's roles actually contributed to their place in history.

Time required

45 minutes

Materials and space required

- Board (for writing)
- Classroom
- Several printed resource materials describing the lives and achievements of notable Bulgarian women whose names have remained in history

Instructions

1. Introduce the exercise.

Explain to the students that the exercise is designed to explore the qualities that some famous women in Bulgarian history have had. Students will also reflect on whether these qualities or behaviors were expected of women in the historical era.

2. Divide the class into small mixed groups of 4-5 (approximately equal numbers of boys and girls in the groups if possible) and distribute the pre-printed examples. Each group reads the example and discusses it, noting their answers to the following questions:

- In which era did the described historical figure live?
- What were the usual occupations of women in this era?
- What qualities did the person described possess?
- How did the actions of the person described differ from the usual activities of women in this era?

3. Presentations of the results of the small group discussions.

Each group nominates two representatives: one girl and one boy to present the example and the qualities of the historical figure described. While the groups present the personalities, the teacher writes on the board the names of the historical personalities and for each name the qualities that the students identified as important.

For example: Raina Knyaginya - brave, fearless, inspired, determined, etc.

4. General discussion

The teacher instructs students to examine the qualities noted on the board of women who have remained in history/culture as notable individuals. Asks the class if they see anything in common in the qualities described. The students should point out the qualities that are repeated. The teacher asks questions that stimulate discussion:

- What is common among the notable women in Bulgarian history?
- What set them apart from other women in the same era?
- Do the qualities listed coincide with societal expectations of women in the era in which the person lived?

5. Conclusion

End the exercise by concluding that women who have left their mark on history have often violated societal expectations of what is appropriate for women to do or not to do. This is precisely why they have performed heroic acts or achieved excellence in science, culture, and sports. In conclusion, note that societal expectations of women and men must be understood and made meaningful, lest they become a factor that limits individual possibilities.

Advice to the teacher

Draw students' attention to the fact that not conforming to gender expectations and norms can lead to extraordinary achievements realized by an individual that change lives.

Also draw their attention to the fact that there are no purely masculine/feminine qualities. Make a link to the previous exercise where you looked at what qualities society usually attributes to women/men, but this stereotypical notion should not be used as a limitation to the realisation of individual potential.



Application:

Examples of notable Bulgarian women

Advice to the teacher:

Take examples from textbooks that students know well.

If there are not enough examples of notable Bulgarian women in the textbooks for the respective age level, you can use additional literature, for example the book by Desi Niko *“Bold and Different – The Stories of 50 Amazing Bulgarian Women”*, published by Rocket, 2020. The scientific editor of the publication is Katya Zografova – a literary historian, but also a biographer of remarkable Bulgarian women, a documentary writer, an essayist and a poet. She is the author of 16 books, including „The Many-Faced Bulgarian Woman. Remarkable Women from the Renaissance to the Present Day“, etc.

The book *“Bold and Different”* presents female travelers, actresses, singers, ballerinas, athletes, writers with amazing stories. Brilliant women scientists who have made discoveries in nuclear physics, in psychiatry or dived to find the remains of sunken cities in the depths of the sea. The stories are told engagingly and simply so that they can be easily understood by elementary students. Each section in the book ends with an interactive section with interesting and fun games and quizzes. They encourage readers to seek out additional information; to think and be creative; to feel the spirit of times gone by and of professions they can safely practice today. The teacher can use ideas from this interactive section to encourage children to gain confidence, to believe in their talents, to discover what they really like and what they don't.



Exercise 3

Let's talk about the division of household chores in the family

Contents

An exercise to reflect on whose duty it is to do the housework and whether its allocation is gender related (female/male). The exercise involves dividing the class into two large mixed groups (boys and girls) and each group has to formulate as many arguments as possible in support of one position, which will fall to them after the draw of lots. This is followed by a discussion in the two separate groups, formulating arguments for and against and presenting them to the other group. A general class discussion and conclusion follows.

Purpose of the exercise

Introduce the concepts of 'equal rights' and 'equality' and help students to reflect on how equality is achieved between women and men in the family in terms of the distribution of household work and duties. Students will reflect on who should be involved in housework and why.

Time required

45 minutes



Instructions

1. Introduce the exercise

The teacher introduces the concepts of „equal rights“ and „equality“, explaining the difference between them. He says that the understanding of women’s rights and duties has been different in different historical eras. In modern Bulgarian society, by law, women have equal rights with men. They have successfully entered all spheres of activity that in previous eras were considered suitable only for men. At the same time, housework still seems to remain predominantly ‚women’s territory‘. It is for this reason that it is appropriate to discuss equality between women and men in the family. The exercise will help to talk about how it would be fair to allocate housework to allow women to be treated as equals to men in the family. How society’s perceptions are changing in this area.



2. Exercise in two large groups

Divide the class into two large mixed groups (girls and boys). Write on the board. Have a short discussion about what chores are and write the answers on the board.

For example:

- Cleaning the house
- Washing dishes
- Cooking/serving/de-serving
- Garbage disposal
- Laundry
- Ironing
- Arranging the interior
- Shopping for food

**Write the following answers to the question
“Who should do housework” on two separate small pieces of paper:**

- Women only,
- Both women and men, and also children.

Draw lots as to which position each group should defend.

Give the following instructions to the groups:

- After a short discussion, write down on a sheet the most important arguments they can think of to support their position.
- Select two speakers to present the arguments to the whole group.



3. Presentation of the homework arguments to the class and general discussion

The speakers of the two groups present their arguments while the teacher writes them in a summary on the board under the two statements. The teacher then facilitates a general discussion on the topic.

For example:

- Only women should do housework because it is inherent in a woman by nature and related to childcare.

Sample teacher questions that problematize this argument:

- If the woman in the family goes to work 8 hours a day, as does the man, whom of the two has more free time?
- If the free time of both working spouses is roughly equal, would it be fair for the housework to be done only by the wife?
- Is the woman less in need of rest and private time than the man?
- What about cases where one spouse is unemployed? Is it fair for the unemployed spouse to take on all the housework? If not, why not?
 - Please justify your answers. For example: it is not fair for the unemployed family member to take on all the housework because s/he will not be able to study for further qualifications or actively look for a new job; s/he will be overworked and depressed, etc.
- If a woman is raising a baby and is therefore on maternity leave, should she take on all the housework? If not, why not?
 - Possible answers: to have private time like the rest of the family, so she doesn't feel overworked and restricted.



Another exemplary argument of the students from the group defending the thesis that housework should be done only by women:

- Men are not as good as women at housework. Even if they want to do it, they don't do it as well as women; they can't cook that well, etc., so it's better for women to do it.

Here are the counterarguments to that:

- Are girls born with the skills to clean or cook? Or are these skills learned because of the expectations of their relatives and of society that a woman should be able to do such work?
- If these skills are acquired, then they can be acquired by both women and men, do you agree with that?
- Do you know any good chefs who are men? And good waiters? If you know such people, then cooking and serving skills are not purely female.

The arguments of the group that maintains that housework should be divided between women, men and children should also be discussed and supported with examples:

- How to reach an agreement in the family that the housework can be divided among everyone?
 - Possible answer: when everyone talks about the issue and comes to a common decision that satisfies everyone and is in line with their needs and capabilities.

- What does it mean to distribute household work according to the abilities and needs of each family member?
 - For example, a child cannot take on all the household work even if s/he has the most free time after school, because this will take away from her/his time for self-training and development.
- Although raising children is not a chore, give an example of how it can also be shared between the woman and the man.
 - A possible answer here is taking paternity leave,
 - The children can give examples of how the father drops off/picks up the child from kindergarten while the mother prepares dinner for everyone.

The teacher should encourage students not to be shy about expressing personal opinions while justifying their answers, not just stating a position.

4. Conclusion

On the basis of the discussion, the teacher can draw some conclusions which show that there is no single recipe for a fair distribution of household work in the family, but it is certain that these chores should not be done by only one person (usually the wife) if the family consists of several people.

Housework is work, albeit unpaid. An equitable distribution of housework creates equal opportunities for individuals in the family to have and use time for themselves, allowing them to rest, have fun, or develop in a new field. Ultimately, a balanced and fair distribution of household chores is one of the factors for personal satisfaction of the members in the family.



