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Towards more Gender-Sensitivity in Youth Work with Boys and Young Men

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For a long time, it was not considered necessary in youth work to pay attention to the situation or needs of male adolescents. While the focus had been put mostly on the empowerment of girls, boys as the "strong gender" did not seem to need specific support or guidance. Latest national and international studies have reported an alarming increase in problematic behaviours among male adolescents, including worsening school performance, substance abuse, aggressive conduct, emotional withdrawal and high suicide rates. One explanation for this is the impact of gender, a social construct which has a powerful influence on our lives and creates different socialisation processes for girls and boys. According to current research, many boys suffer from a lack of orientation and conflicting societal expectations on building their (gender) identities as young men. Next to traditional expectations of masculinity including male toughness, strength and unfeelingness, more advanced concepts of masculinity have emerged and demand additional soft skills like sensuality, empathy and sensitivity. These conflicting requests can lead to negative impacts on the development and behaviours of boys and young men, such as aggression, low self-esteem and drug abuse.

Social institutions offering youth services are important instances where gender roles can be either strengthened or eliminated. It is therefore particularly important for anyone working with adolescents to reflect on their own perceptions of gender, to evaluate how these perceptions affect the client work, and to obtain the latest information and knowledge on gender and gender theories.

As part of this thesis, measures were developed that raise awareness among youth workers regarding specific needs of boys in youth work. Therefore, a workshop was designed which offers youth workers the possibility of joint reflection and the acquisition of new knowledge on gender-sensitive working practices. In addition, key information and practical tips on the implementation of gender-sensitive working practices were combined in an introductory handbook for professionals. Both the workshop and the handbook were put into practice at the multicultural youth centre R3 in Vantaa. The workshop uncovered that the participating youth workers had received barely any training on gender or gender-sensitive working practices with boys. After the workshop, all participants stated that they had gained new knowledge and awareness on the issue. This shows that already small measures like half-day workshops can raise awareness for gender-sensitivity in youth work.

Keywords	gender, masculinity, stereotypes, social constructivism, gender-sensitivity, adolescence, youth work, workshop, handbook

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Nuorisotyössä on keskitetty jo pidemmän aikaa tyttöjen voimauttamiseen, mutta unohdettu pojat sekä heidän tarpeensa. "Vahvempana sukupuolena" poikien ei katsottu tarvitsevan sen kummempaa tukea tai ohjausta. Viimeisimmät kansalliset ja kansainväliset tutkimukset kuitenkin osoittavat poikien tilanteen kehittyneen huolestuttavaan suuntaan: poikien koulumenestys on heikentynyt samalla kun aineiden väärinkäyttö, emotionaalinen eristäytyminen, sekä itsemurhat ovat lisääntyneet. Yksi selittävä tekijä tässä kehityksessä on sosiaalisen sukupuolen vaikutus. Sosiaalinen sukupuoli on konstruktio, joka yhä vaikuttaa yhteiskunnassa luomalla pojille ja tytöille erilaiset sosiaaliset ympäristöt. Viimeisimpien tutkimusten mukaan monet pojat kärsivätkin sekä orientaation puutteesta että sosiaalisen sukupuolen asettamista ristiriitaisista vaatimuksista kehittäessään omaa identiteettiään nuorina miehinä.

Perinteisen kovan, vahvan ja tunteettoman miehenkuvan rinnalle on ilmestynyt kehittyneempiä malleja maskuliinisuudesta, jotka edellyttävät perinteisten vaatimusten lisäksi myös pehmeitä taitoja, kuten tunteikkuutta, empatiakykyä, ja aistikkuutta. Nämä keskenään ristiriitaiset vaateet voivat johtaa negatiivisiin seurauksiin poikien ja nuorten miesten kehityksessä ja käytöksessä: vetäytyminen, aggressio, heikko itsetunto, ja aineiden väärinkäyttö, ovat vain muutamia esimerkkejä mahdollisista seurauksista.

Sosiaaliset instituutiot kuten erilaiset nuorisopalvelut, joissa sukupuoliroolien vaikutukset voivat joko vahvistua tai poistua, ovat tärkeässä asemassa poikien tukemisessa. Onkin erityisen tärkeää, että kaikki nuorten kanssa työskentelevät käsittelisivät omaa näkemystään sukupuolesta ja sukupuolirooleista; pohtisivat sitä, kuinka tämä vaikuttaa heidän työhönsä, sekä hankkisivat ajankohtaista tietoa ja tietämystä sukupuoliteorioista.

Tämän lopputyö yhteydessä kehitettiin keinoja, joiden avulla nuorisotyöntekijät voisivat parantaa ymmärrystään poikien erityistarpeista nuorisotyössä. Nämä konkretisoituivat nuorisotyöntekijöille suunnatun työpajan sekä aiheeseen johdattavan käsikirjan muodossa. Työpaja pidettiin, ja käsikirja otettiin käyttöön, Vantaan R3-nuorisotalossa, joka on erikoistunut multikulttuuriseen nuorisotyöhön. Työpaja paljasti siihen osallistuneiden nourisotyöntekijöiden jääneen lähes täysin paitsi poikien näkökulmasta tehtävään suokupuolisensitiiviseen työhön valmistavasta koulutuksesta. Työpajan jälkeen osallistujat kertoivat saaneensa sen kautta sekä uutta tietoa että kehittäneensä ymmärrystään sukupuolisensitiivisestä työstä poikien kanssa. Tämä osoittaa, kuinka jo pienimuotoiset keinot, kuten puolen päivän työpajat, voivat lisätä tietoisuutta sukupuolisensitiivisyydestä nuorisotyössä.

Avainsanat	sosiaalinen sukupuoli, maskuliinisuus, stereotypiat, sosiaalinen konstruktionismi, sukupuolisensitiivisyys, nuoruus, nuorisotyö, työpaja, kasikirja

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"It is not just that social structures shape individuals,

but also that individuals shape social structures"

Barbara Risman (2004)

1   Introduction

For a long time, it was not regarded as necessary in youth work to pay particular attention to the situation and needs of male adolescents. This was not least caused by boys and young men themselves: they often seem to embody the "stronger gender" by appearing as daring, cool, always joking and having everything under control. (Hollstein & Matzner 2007, p. 9; Pollack 1998, p. 10.) However, current national and international studies have provided a different picture: there has been an alarming increase in problematic behaviours among male adolescents, ranging from worsening school performances, substance abuse, aggressive conduct to a lack of self-esteem, emotional withdrawal and high suicide rates (Pollack 1998, p. 9.; Räsänen, Lintonen & Konu 2015, p. 7; Terveyden ja Hyvinvoinnin Laitos 2015a).

Only lately, have researchers started to investigate the situation of boys more closely. One important finding is that many boys suffer from a lack of orientation and from conflicting societal expectations in building their (gender) identities. The traditional view of masculinity is still commonly present in our Western society, requesting male toughness, strength, independency and unfeelingness. But new and more advanced concepts of masculinity have also emerged which demand additional soft skills like sensuality, empathy and sensitivity. (Hertling 2008, pp. 1-2; Pollack 1998, p. 26.) It is not surprising that these conflicting demands lead to insecurities and low self-esteem for many boys, as well as to problematic behaviours like violence and drug abuse, which express the frustration about the situation (Titley 2003, p. 5). In addition, a silent retreat and escape behind the unemotional "mask of masculinity" is a common coping strategy suggesting that everything is under control and no intervention needed (Pollack 1998, p. 26). This situation is also worsened by the lack of supporting male identification and role models in families, educational institutions and social services (Sielert 2002, p. 53). Many social workers working with youth have noticed this development, but the lack of deeper understanding, awareness and information hinders a successful resolution of the issue. The young service users remain therefore often without sufficient support and guidance in managing their situation. (Hollstein & Matzner 2007, pp. 9-12.)

While working during one of my internships in a youth facility for boys and young men, I experienced first-hand the difficulty of responding adequately to the affected masculinity of some clients. The seldom but strong outbursts of emotions of some of the young men felt at times overstraining, and demonstrated the pressure to keep up the veneer of

strength and control towards their environment in order to fit the expected image of the "real" man. I also realized the great need for further training of professionals regarding a gender-sensitive approach in the work with male adolescents to better support them in finding their roles in society.

With this thesis, I aim to increase the awareness and knowledge on this topic among youth workers at a chosen youth facility. Social institutions are important instances where gender role expectations can be either strengthened or eliminated. Consequently, youth workers need to have a clear understanding of the concept of masculinity and its effects on male clients. I intend to encourage the professionals at the chosen facility to reflect on their own internalised values and perceptions on gender in order to prevent unintentional affections on their working practices. To reach these objectives, I have developed two concrete products along with this thesis paper: a workshop on gender-sensitive youth work with male teenagers for professionals and a handbook with practical information on the implementation of gender-sensitivity in day-to-day work at youth facilities.

The planning and implementing of these products was supported by the Theory of Social Constructivism. It was used as the theoretical framework of this thesis project. Social constructivism regards gender as a product constructed in social interaction within our society and culture (Gergen 1985, pp. 267-270). Only careful reflection on one´s perceptions on gender and the acquisition of up-to-date knowledge on gender and its impacts supports new approaches and ideas on how to fosters the clients´ development based on their individual needs, desires and wishes, instead of traditional gendered ways of being and living.

The working life partner for this thesis project is the multicultural youth centre R3 (Maahanmuuttajanuorten tuki ry) in Vantaa. Their youth workers participated in the workshop on gender-sensitive youth work and received the handbook related to the topic. The experiences gained, knowledge and products of this thesis project can serve as an example and a starting point for projects in other institutions which aim to adjust their working practices towards a more gender-sensitive approach.

Finally, I want to add the notion that supporting boys and young men in freeing themselves from restraining gender roles does not counteract the empowerment of girls and women. To the contrary, weakening the impact of role expectations in one gender supports the other gender, as there can be no masculinity without femininity - and vice versa.

2   On the Working Life Partner R3

The working life partner of this thesis project was R3, a multicultural youth centre in Vaskivuorentie 25 in Vantaa. The institution offers low-threshold services to youths of 14 to 29-years of age. Its main focus is to prevent the marginalisation of young immigrants in the Helsinki area and to support them in challenging situations like unemployment, homelessness and being torn between different cultures. The institution was founded in 2003 and is politically and religiously independent.

The three 'Rs' in the title of the organisation refer to its underlying values and working ethics: respect, rights and responsibility. R3 puts emphasis on a strength-based approach in their youth work which focuses on the resources of their service users instead of seeing them as "problem youngsters".

Three key projects aim to support the objectives of R3: R3 Info! as an information and service centre, R3 Action! as a project offering advice in challenging life situations related to issues like unemployment, drug abuse, crime or relationship problems, and R3 NUVA which provides opportunities for sports and free time activities. Other smaller projects like home work groups, outreach work and the distribution of left-over food from local schools are supported by volunteers or part time instructors. Services are offered on six to seven days a week. The year 2015 saw more than 7000 service user visits. The service users belong to at least 19 different language groups, including Somali, Albanian, Arabic, Russian, Urdu, Burmese and Turkish.

Special services are offered for girls and young women, like the Girls' Day, special support in forming one´s multicultural and gender identity, and advice regarding career choices and health issues. Guest speakers are invited to contribute to relevant topics. A special space within the institution can be used by immigrant girls and young women for sewing works. In addition, once a week a group meeting for young mothers and their small children is offered.

For boys and young men there are no comparable services offered (except from some games evenings and sports events) which is mostly related to the difficulties to motivate and commit the male service users to long-term projects. Therefore, R3 regards the difficulty of engaging male service users into projects as one of the key challenges in their work. (Annual report of R3 2015; Tahvanainen & Lebaron 2016; R3 2016.)

For this reason, R3 was keen on engaging with this thesis project. Due to limited time and personnel resources, the team at R3 had not managed to direct specific attention towards improving their working practices in becoming more gender-sensitive. The youth workers were aware that they did not offer diverse enough activities to their male clients, but mostly typical "boys´ things" like football events or games evenings. (Tahvanainen & Lebaron 2016.) Challenges in interpreting masculinities also seemed to be part of the problem: one youth worker stated that some male clients with immigrant backgrounds expressed their manliness particularly strongly which led to insecurities of the pedagogues in how to react adequately.

R3 was very aware of these shortcomings and expressed a strong intention to improve this situation, especially since about 70% of their service users were male (Tahvanainen & Lebaron 2016). Therefore, R3 showed great interest in participating in the workshop on gender-sensitive youth work with boys and young men, to gain up-to-date information as well as concrete ideas on how to deal with this issue and improve their working practices in future.

3 Context

This chapter provides the necessary background information for a deeper insight into the subject of gender-sensitive youth work with boys and young men. The content of the workshop at R3 and the related handbook are based on this information.

The importance of paying special attention to the needs of boys and young men in youth work becomes clear when scrutinising current research studies on the situation of teenage boys in Finland. Relevant data are summarized in section 3.1 and aim to help youth workers to get a clearer idea of the areas where boys and young men need additional support and guidance. These data can be partly interpreted as an outcome of the way in which boys are currently socialised in our society. This leads to the subject of gender which is dealt with in section 3.2. Only by understanding the concept of gender and knowing how it is constructed can youth workers search for ways to make this concept more open and flexible so that its strict norms would not restrain young people in their development. Furthermore, this awareness avoids personal assumptions on gender unintentionally influencing the actions of professionals.

Gender has different impacts on males and females. Sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 highlight how gender affects men, and in particular male adolescents. This information is essential to youth workers understanding and recognizing gendered behaviours in their male service users, and to react accordingly.

It is important to know one´s starting position, therefore section 3.3 provides a brief overview on the current Finnish gender policy, again with special focus on the situation of boys and men. Subsequently, the core of this thesis project is reached, which is gender-sensitive youth work with boys and young men. How can youth work contribute to a more gender-reflected and equal society? How can youth workers create an atmosphere in which traditional gender roles are no longer obstacles to personal freedom and self-realisation, but where options and skills can be freely explored? What does gender-sensitivity in pedagogy mean in the first place? Section 3.4 explores these questions, which are then handled in a more practical manner in the attached handbook.

3.1   Challenges of Boys and Young Men in Finland

Recent research studies on the Finnish youth have also focused on gender differences in well-being and life situations of boys and girls. Several results suggest that Finnish boys face more challenges than girls in various areas of life.

The Finnish Youth Barometer regularly assesses the situation of Finnish adolescents in different areas of life. In their study in 2015, 38% of boys stated that they managed with life in general poorly or rather poorly (compared to 22% of girls) (Youth Barometer 2015, p.1). Boys have, for instance regarding substance abuse, a riskier lifestyle than girls: The study points out that the usage of intoxicants is especially common among boys (Finnish Youth Research Society, 2015). This is supported by other studies: Räsänen, Lintonen and Konu (2015, p. 7) found out that 9.3% of male 8th and 9th graders have used drugs at least once, in comparison to 6.6% of girls. Alcohol is also used slightly more frequently among male adolescents as 7.7% of boys use alcohol at least once a week, compared to 5.9% of girls (Räsänen, Lintonen & Konu 2015, p. 7). Despite Finnish adolescents smoke nowadays less compared to the last decades, 27% of the 15- 29-year-old boys still smoke regularly (18% of girls) (Myllyniemi 2014, p. 39). In addition, snus usage is much more common among boys than girls: According to the Finnish National School Health Promotion Study 2015, 12 to 18% of 8th and 9th graders use snus daily, while only 2% of girls do so (Tseveenjav, Pesonen & Virtanen 2015, p.

2). The study suggests that male adolescents have in general a more drug- and risk-seeking lifestyle which may lead -if continued- to a less favorable health situation in future (Tseveenjav, Pesonen & Virtanen 2015, p. 5).

Next to the abuse of substances, gambling is also part of the risk seeking lifestyle of many boys: male adolescents attending the 8th and 9th school years were eight times more likely than girls to engage once or twice a week in gambling like bingo, lotteries and casino games (Räsänen, Lintonen & Konu 2015, p. 7). According to research data, regular gambling is often connected to a variety of other lifestyle and behavioral problems like truancy and delinquency (Räsänen, Lintonen & Konu 2015, p. 13).

Furthermore, teenage boys perform worse at school than girls. This has been pointed out not only by the latest PISA studies in which in the Finnish test results boys were in several testing areas amongst the 70% of poorest performers (YLE 2015). Besides, Finland has shown repeatedly in some areas the widest gender gap in performance among all participating countries (Välijärvi, Linnakylä, Kupari, Reinikainen & Arffman 2000, p. 30; OECD 2012, p. 3). That Finnish boys struggle with school performance more than girls, is also apparent in the amount of boys in need of special support with managing school. The Finnish National Board of Education offers additional educational services to poorly performing students from 7th to 9th grade, like intensified and special support. These services aim to prevent students from dropping out of school and being excluded from further education and employment. (Finnish National Board of Education, 2015 a.) The large majority of students participating in the program are boys: According to the Statistical Service of the Finnish National Board of Education (Opetus Hallinnon Tilastopalvelu), about twice as many boys than girls perceived additional educational services in 2011 to 2013 (Finnish National Board of Education 2015 b). Figure 1 provides the exact numbers of male and female participants by year.

	Pupils receiving intensified support		Pupils receiving special support	
Year	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
2011	4.2 %	2.4 %	11.0 %	5.1 %
2012	6.5 %	3.6 %	10.3 %	4.7 %
2013	8.2 %	4.6 %	9.9 %	4.6 %

FIGURE 1. Numbers of boys and girls participating in additional educational services 2011-2013. Source: Finnish National Board of Education 2015b.

Another big challenge of male adolescents in Finland is the lack of close friends and loneliness: According to a recent study, 12% of boys (and 6% of girls) attending 8th and 9th grade reported to have no close friends to share personal issues with. This applied to boys of all levels of education. (Terveyden ja Hyvinvoinnin Laitos 2015b, p. 1.) Besides, social and emotional loneliness lasting for at least a year was perceived by 17% of boys (and 10% of girls) attending 7th to 9th grade (Juntilla 2015 in Terveyden ja Hyvinvoinnin Laitos 2015b, p. 1). The lack of close friends in adolescence is often related to poorer physical and mental health. Those without close friends also suffered more from problems in school like being bullied or having troubles with teachers, and were more likely to use drugs. (Terveyden ja Hyvinvoinnin Laitos 2015b, pp. 2-3.) Surprisingly, Finnish teenage boys meet peers still more often than girls: According to the Finnish Youth Barometer (2015, p. 2), 60% of boys reported to meet their friends on a daily basis (44% of girls). This raises the question whether either the quality of contact between boys is less intimate than similar relationships between girls, or whether a small minority of boys is socially very excluded.

Most alarming are the high suicide rates amongst young men in Finland: Three out of four suicides among adolescents are committed by boys. One possible explanation for this could be the inability of boys to express feelings like sorrow combined with the lack of close friends. (YLE 2014.) Each week, one Finnish teenager between the age 15 to 19 commits suicide, 70% of these are male. While the number of adult suicides has decreased during the recent decades, this does not apply to the same extent to suicides among adolescents. (YLE 2014.) A third of adolescents committing suicide are intoxicated (Terveyden ja Hyvinvoinnin Laitos 2015a), which is an important detail when considering that boys are more involved in substance abuse than girls. Figure 2 shows the numbers of adolescents and young adults having committed suicide from 2001 to 2013. It is clear that boys and young men of all ages commit suicides more often than girls, with a peek from age 20 to 24.

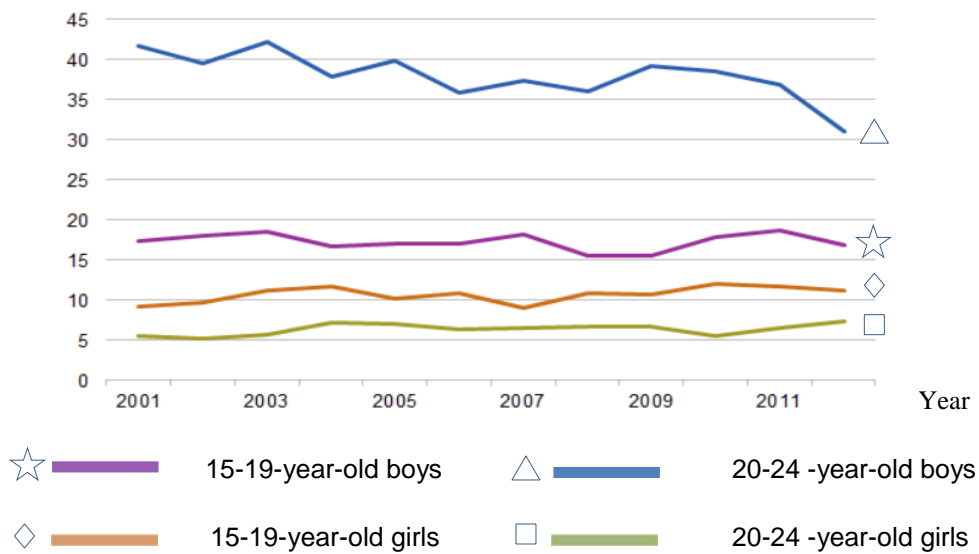Deaths / 100 000 persons (3 year moving average)

FIGURE 2 - The number of 15 – 24-year-olds who committed suicide in Finland between 2001 – 2013 (deaths per 100 000 persons), divided into different age groups and sexes. Source: Terveyden ja Hyvinvoinnin Laitos 2015a.

The Specific Situation of Immigrant Boys in Finland

The Finnish School Health Promotion Study 2013 focused especially on the well-being of students with an immigrant background in 8th and 9th grade (Matikka, Luopa, Kivimäki, Jokela & Paananen 2015). Since immigrant boys are the main target group of the working life partner R3, specific focus will be given to this issue.

According to this study, 29% of boys (compared to 16% of girls) from first-generation immigrant families stated that they had no close friends (Matikka, Luopa, Kivimäki, Jokela & Paananen 2015, p. 13). The numbers of boys who had experienced threats of physical violence was also very large: 42% of first-generation immigrant boys (26% of first-generation immigrant girls) revealed that they had been threatened with physical violence during the last year before the study. In addition, boys from second-generation immigrant families reported high numbers, with 33% of them (22% of girls) having been threatened with
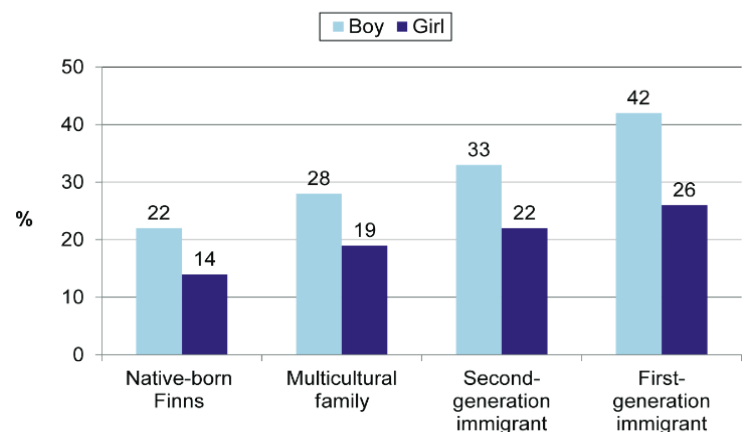

FIGURE 3. Boys and girls with different cultural background having experienced threats of physical violence during the last year. Source: Finnish Health Promotion Study 2013

violence. Of native born Finnish adolescents, in comparison much less, but still 22% of boys (14% girls), had similar experiences. (Matikka, Luopa, Kivimäki, Jokela & Paananen 2015, p. 13.)

Also sexual violence - like unwanted touching of intimate body parts, being coerced into sexual acts or being offered payment in exchange for sex - was experienced more among immigrants: 32% of first-generation immigrant boys (28% of girls) reported to have been victim of sexual violence. 19% of second-generation boys (24% of girls) had experienced sexual violence, while this applied to 7-10% of native-born Finnish boys (19% of girls). (Matikka, Luopa, Kivimäki, Jokela & Paananen 2015, p. 14.)

While 7% of native-born Finnish boys reported being bullied weekly at school (girls 6%), 20% of first-generation immigrant boys mentioned it (14% girls) (Matikka, Luopa, Kivimäki, Jokela & Paananen 2015, p. 18).

In addition, substance abuse is significantly higher amongst boys with an immigrant background: 34% of first-generation immigrant boys (19% girls) reported to smoke daily, in comparison to 14% of native born Finnish boys (11% of girls). Besides, alcohol was consumed most by first-generation immigration boys since 31% mentioned getting drunk at least once per month (17% of girls). Of the other boys, 11 to 15% reported similar activities (9-14% of other girls). (Matikka, Luopa, Kivimäki, Jokela & Paananen 2015, p. 25.)

Illegal substances had been tried by 37% of first-generation immigrant boys (20% of girls), 21% of second-generation immigrant boys (10% of girls) and 9% of native-born Finnish boys (6% of girls) (Matikka, Luopa, Kivimäki, Jokela & Paananen 2015, p. 26).

Conclusion

Finnish teenage boys seem to manage life in general poorer than girls, have riskier and unhealthier lifestyles and suffer more from school-related problems, violence and social exclusion. What is the cause of these differences between boys and girls? Attempting to answer this question might bring up the old debate of "nature versus nurture", biological versus external factors that influence our behaviors. But no serious scientific study has been able to prove that different gendered behaviors stem from physical differences – like differences in hormones or brains of males and females (Knothe 2012, p. 96). Therefore, explanations for the different life styles of boys and girls need to be

found somewhere else. Several scientists see the reason for these differences in different socialization experiences of girls and boys, including different societal expectations towards them (Hertling 2008, p. 154; Paechter 2007 p. 6). Therefore, a deeper insight into the theory of gender and the influence of gender on our lives is required, when developing working practices in youth work that aim to meet the real needs of boys, improve the boys´ quality of life and support them in getting their lives under control.

3.2   Gender in Our Western Society

> *"We are born male or female, but not masculine or feminine."*
>
> (Bartky 1990, p. 65)

3.2.1   Gender versus Sex

When speaking of someone being a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, we are often not aware that we touch hereby on two very different concepts: sex and gender. In order to understand the impacts of gender on our lives, it is important to be aware what these two terms actually refer to.

Sex is mostly regarded as determined by biology (Edgar & Sedgwick 2008, p 139), it is relatively fixed (Paechter 2007, p. 7) and relates to our anatomy, hormones and physiology (West & Zimmerman 1987, p. 125). Due to physical features like our genitals, it is mostly clear from birth whether one is male or female. Still, there are many exceptions which do not allow such easy categorization. These could be ambiguous and incompatible physical criteria like different physical morphologies or chromosome configurations (West & Zimmerman 1987, pp. 125-126). Therefore, the assumption that everyone has to fit into one of the two categories is often criticized (Paechter 2007, p. 10).

Gender is mostly regarded as the opposite of sex: While sex is a "*matter of biology*", gender is a "*matter of culture*" (Edgar & Sedgwick 2008, p. 139). Gender is more flexible (Paechter 2007, p. 10) and can be described as "*the amount of masculinity and femininity found in a person" (*Stoller in Paechter 2007, p. 10). While sex is about being male or female, gender is about behaving masculine or feminine (Edgar & Sedgwick 2008, p. 139). Therefore, gender is not something that we <u>are</u>, but something that we <u>do</u>. We are born female or male, but we do not naturally behave feminine or masculine, but learn the "right" way of behaving as part of our socialization as male or female members of our

society. (Stuve & Debus 2012b, p. 33.) Gender is mostly not created by one individual him- or herself, but in the interaction with others; subsequently, gender originates from a higher, institutional level. (West & Zimmerman 1987, p. 126.)

How we express and live our gender, our femininity or masculinity, depends strongly on the culture in which we live (Edgar & Sedgwick 2008, p 139). We learn at just a very young age what behaviours are regarded as "appropriate" in our culture for males and females, and that we and our behaviours are judged on differently depending on whether we are male or female (Hertling 2008, p. 154). While for instance some behaviours like being emotional and crying are societally accepted for girls, boys may be ridiculed or even punished for the same acts. Therefore, boys and girls form and develop differently during their socialization (Hertling 2008, p. 154).

3.2.2   Impact of Gender Today

According to the general assumption in Western society today, gender equality has been almost fully achieved both politically as well as morally - after decades of fighting, mostly by the feminists in the 1970s and 80s (Stuve & Debus 2012b, p. 28; Hertling 2008, pp. 6-13). It seems that nearly all options are open to everyone regardless of his or her gender, and what is still different between males and females must be related to biological differences due to the lack of other plausible reasons (Stuve & Debus 2012b, p. 28).

Many scientists argue that this perception is wrong: The concept of gender still influences and directs our lives in very powerful ways. Whether we are female or male is often the decisive factor in how we are treated by others, what roles we gain in society and how we are expected to behave or even to feel. (Paechter 2007 p. 6.) The predominant concept of gender still forces us to position ourselves clearly as belonging to one of the two societally accepted genders, and to behave accordingly. Societally accepted and desired behaviours are reinforced by our environment, while undesirable ways of acting are rejected and weakened. Since boys and girls therefore experience different kinds of reinforcements and ways of being treated, gender-specific interests, tendencies and skills are fostered. (Hertling 2008, p. 155.) This leads to a "specialisation" that we have to go through, and therefore to a loss of options in ways that we could develop, act and behave (Stuve & Debus, 2012b, p. 30). Subsequently, boys and girls develop through gender-specific education and socialisation different interests and mostly very different ways of spending their leisure time (Hertling 2008, p. 150). This learnt way of behaving becomes

more and more part of our individual identity (Paechter 2007 p. 6). It seems that our behavior as males or females is quite natural. This way, gender-specific expectations regarding our behaviors and performances are confirmed in a far reaching way as "self-fulfilling prophecies" (Hertling 2008, p. 155).

One problem is of course that we waive a wide range of possibilities and ways to express our individual personalities in order to fit gender-specific norms (Hertling 2008, p. 80). Stuve and Debus (2012 b, p. 30) point out that the concept of gender is merely restricting to anyone who manages to develop clearly into a "typical" male or female. However, to those who do not fit or do not want to fit into those two categories, the concept is marginalising. This relates to people who are transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, intersexual, as well as to those who are bisexual or homosexual; but it also makes life difficult for all those who cannot or just do not want to be and behave like a "proper" girl or boy, woman or man. (Stuve & Debus, 2012b, p. 30.)

How does gender affect boys and men in specifically? How does the socialization process of boys look like, and what expectations are placed onto males in our society? The information in the following two sections is important for learning to interpret masculine behaviors of teenage boys and to understand their origins.

3.2.3 Masculinity and Our Image of Men

As mentioned before, males and females face different societal expectations in their way of acting, behaving, appearing and living their lives. Masculinity means the social and cultural expectations towards boys and men, and what is regarded as masculine in a specific society (Paechter 2007 p. 12). This relates for instance to their specific way of thinking and behaving, their specific desires and their outlooks (Burr 1998, p. 12). To exaggerate slightly, the stereotypical man in our Western society is expected to think in logical and rational ways, to be in control of his emotions, to have a sexual desire for women and a passion for football, ice hockey and fast cars.

Masculinity is also regarded as the opposite way of stereotypical behaviors of girls and women (Titley 2003, p. 11). Therefore, many boys and men try to overcome all innate female character traits in order to be more "manly" (Hertling 2008, p. 71). Typical "woman behaviour" is excluded from the set of desired masculine behaviours and character traits, like caring for close social relationships, expressing one´s emotional life openly, being empathetic, being passive, relying on intuition and admitting vulnerability (Sielert 2002,

p. 48.) Instead, important values of masculinity are traits like rationality, proactivity, clarity, control over oneself and others, as well as independency and a good fighting spirit (Sielert 2002, p. 48). These ideals are also mirrored in the outer appearance of the "perfect" teenage boy or man: He should be muscular and accentuate his masculinity with gestures, but with only a few emotions expressed (Titley 2003, p. 10). The concept of masculinity seems closer to an idealist version of a boy or man than to any real male human being, and is therefore mostly not reachable. (Paechter 2007, p. 12.) Still, we are reminded of this "ideal" image of masculinity so regularly in everyday life - especially in advertisement, films, and other media - that it is easily forgotten that we deal with nothing else than an idealized version of our collective imagination.

3.2.4   Gender in Adolescence and its Impacts on Male Teenagers

During adolescence, boys are particularly affected by identity conflicts and insecurities regarding their roles in society (Hollstein 2007, p. 44). This is not surprising since adolescence is the time in which boys build their potential male adult selves (Clarke-Stewart & Parke 2014, p. 301). Therefore, young people have a strong tendency to take on gender-typical patterns of behaviors (Clarke-Stewart & Parke 2014, p. 301). Girls often aim to be particularly feminine regarding their behaviors and outlook; boys perform the "proper" man with the necessary toughness and coolness, and often an ample amount of machismo.

Gender roles can create a conflict between fulfilling one´s personal needs and the pressure to perform in certain expected ways (Titley 2003, p. 8). In adolescence, it becomes important to be regarded as mature and grown-up, and to be respected and acknowledged by both peers and adults. (Over-) Performing masculinity seems to be for many boys a way to search for recognition as a "full" man. (Stuve & Debus 2012a, p. 53.) Adolescents often set up their own gender-specific rules on how to behave, dress or spend one´s leisure time to be respected within the clique of their peers (Paechter 2007, p. 16).

One big challenge of male adolescents in finding and building their identities is the lack of concrete and positive male role models in their close environment (Sielert 2002, p. 53). This is above all due to the absence of fathers - since these are mostly either busy with their working life or after a divorce barely available for their children; additionally, the great majority of staff at social institutions like schools or youth centers are female

(Beuster 2007, p. 11). This lack of male role models leaves the teenage boys to search for guidance elsewhere: mostly in the media with its idealized male hero figures. But Rambo, James Bond & Co do not offer applicable solutions to the everyday challenges of teenage boys, nor do they provide individual support, personal acknowledgement or physical and emotional warmth. (Hertling 2008, p. 20; Sielert 2002, p. 53.)

For some boys, this disorientation and the feeling of "not fitting into the role" leads to compensating behaviors like alcohol or substance abuse, emotional withdrawal and expressing one´s frustration in form of aggression. Violence and other criminal activity often arise from the need to wrest back control in a world where the "right" way of behaving is not clear anymore. (Hollstein 2007, p. 42.)

Societal pressure to perform as a "real" boy or young man often forces boys into one-dimensional life-choices: certain personality traits, interests or skills have to be suppressed (Hollstein 2007, p. 40) and a broad range of emotions like fear and sorrow cast aside (Stuve & Debus 2012b, p. 36). Anger and aggression are often the only socially accepted ways in which a male adolescent can express his emotions without fearing devaluation or threats towards his masculinity (Stuve & Debus 2012b, p. 36; Titley 2003, p. 5). Mental and physical closeness are often dismissed to preserve one´s masculinity: since it is expected from boys and men to deal with their problems by themselves, they often speak with their male friends about everything else but the real problems (Sielert 2002, p. 57). In addition, future professions are often chosen more according to societal expectations than on one´s individual wishes or skills (Hertling 2008, p. 72).

The impact of gender on male adolescents described above offers some explanations for the research data on the life of Finnish boys presented in section 3.1. Since many teenage boys aim to perform toughness and coolness in order to conform to the expected image of "real" men, it is no surprise that they gravitate towards risky lifestyles in which they can prove their manliness. Behaviors like extensive alcohol consumption, experimenting with drugs and gambling serve to create the desired image. Also poor school performances of boys have been linked to the influence of gender: The typical attributes of a good student like obedience, discipline, orderliness, diligence and friendliness match the image of a stereotypical girl, but not with the one of a boy (Hertling 2008, p. 61). Therefore, the demands towards boys at school are not compatible with the societal expectations of masculinity (Hertling 2008, pp. 61-63). However, the probably most crucial impact of masculinity has the common view and expectation that boys and men manage

problems silently by themselves, without much signs of emotions or requests for support and closeness from outside. This might explain why so many boys suffer from loneliness and report that they have no close friends with whom they can share intimate issues. Tragically, this may also partly explain the high suicide rates among male teenagers who find no way out of this prison of affected unfeelingness, coolness, keeping up the veneer of strength and loneliness than to end their lives.

What can be done to improve the situation of male adolescents? The basis should be a modern gender policy that assures general gender equality and societal circumstances which allow the free development of all citizens irrespective of their gender. Such gender policy forms the foundation on which social institutions can subsequently build their gender-sensitive working practices. The following section investigates the current state of Finnish gender policy, with a special focus on political measurements taken to improve the situation of boys and men.

3.3   Gender Policy in Finland

3.3.1   Finnish Gender Policy in General

In general, the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health bears the main responsibility for all issues related to gender equality at governmental level (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, n.d.).

The right to equal treatment of each individual regardless of his or her gender is enshrined in the Finnish Constitution. Chapter 2, Section 6 on 'Basic rights and liberties' determines that no one should be treated differently on the grounds of their sex (Finnish Ministry of Justice 1999, p. 2). Especially regarding children, specific emphasis is put on equal and individual treatment (Finnish Ministry of Justice1999, p. 2). The notion of treating young people as individuals is essential in gender-sensitive youth work since it does not allow assessing someone based on their gender, but considers individual character traits and needs. Interesting for anyone working in Social Services is also the statement that "Equality of the sexes is promoted in societal activity." (Finnish Ministry of Justice 1999 p. 2). This makes the promotion of gender equality also a task of social workers, not least in youth work.

A specific act named "The Act on Equality between Women and Men" aims to *"prevent discrimination based on gender, to promote equality between women and men, and thus to improve the status of women, particularly in working life"* (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1986, p. 1). The act prescribes that educational institutions need to set up an annual gender equality plan to assess the current gender equality situation and to plan measurements on how to improve the promotion of gender equality (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1986, pp. 3-4).

Four main authorities are in charge of the promotion of gender equality based at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, n.d.): The Equality Unit and the Ombudsman for Equality are regarded as independent authorities which supervise the compliance with the Act on Equality between Men and Women. Besides, both promote equality and work against discrimination by means of guidance and advice. (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, n.d.; The Ombudsman for Equality, n.d..) The Equality Board represents an independent committee which supervises the compliance with gender equality legislation and deals with related issues (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, n.d.). Finally, the Council for Gender Equality constitutes a parliamentary body which supports gender equality in all societal matters (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, n.d.).

Alongside these four authorities, a sub-committee within the Finnish Parliament deals specifically with matters related to equality in working life and gender relations (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, n.d.).

3.3.2   Representation of Boys and Men in Finnish Gender Policy

It seems that the main objective of the current Finnish gender policy has been to improve the situation and status of women in relation to the labour market (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2007, p. 48). Men receive very little attention, mostly only in the role of "neutral benchmarks" (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2007, p. 27). This might be since the general view is that gender discrimination towards men does not happen since in society men generally possess better statuses than women (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2007, p. 17). Besides, the battle for gender equality of girls and women has a long history (Edgar & Sedgwick 2008, p. 124), which in Finland already goes back more than a hundred years (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs 2014, p. 5). In comparison, the liberation of boys and men from traditional gender roles is a rather new

phenomenon that started about twenty years ago (Ministry of Social Affairs 2014, p. 5). While tens of associations and hundreds of thousands of members in Finland promote women´s equality, there are fewer than ten corresponding organizations for men (Ministry of Social Affairs 2014, p. 5). Hollstein (2007, p. 45) stresses the need for a public debate on the challenges of masculinity and gender roles of men, as well as more political support in these matters. Only in this way can be ensures that also boys and men have the choice of living various kinds of lives (Hollstein 2007, p. 45). Titley (2003, p. 6) argues that most public debates about changes in male identities have so far been limited, half-hearted or sensationalist.

Publicly discussed issues about the connection of men and gender equality are mostly related to fatherhood and the reconciliation of career and family life (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2007, p. 11). Still, several other issues should also be addressed, like the relationships of men to health and divorce, violence of women against men, as well as discrimination of homosexual boys and men (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2007, pp. 17 & 48). In order to address these topics, it is necessary to raise awareness and dispute current traditional conceptions and expectations of men: Since it is still regarded as not masculine to look after one´s health, to work in Social Services or to be a victim of violence, a loosening of the concept of masculinity is a precondition for acknowledging the existence of these issues in order to be able to subsequently discuss and resolve them (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2007, p. 25). Besides, much more specific literature and research on Finnish men and gender equality of males is required (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2007, p. 25).

3.4   Towards Gender-Sensitive Youth Work with Boys and Young Men

Since the political debate on gender equality for males has not proceeded much, it is no surprise that in youth work gender-sensitive practices in the work with boys are still rare. How can youth work contribute to a more gender-sensitive society? What kind of pedagogy is needed to support young people in developing without restraints due to traditional gender patterns? The following sections introduce general ideas and objectives of gender-sensitive youth work. Ideas on how to put these approaches into practice can be found in the handbook attached to this thesis paper. But first, to approach the topic of gender-sensitive youth work, it is necessary to get a brief insight into general youth work in Finland.

3.4.1   Excursus: Youth Work in Finland

Finnish youth work is targeted towards young people up to the age of 29 years (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture 2006, p. 1). It consists of local youth work, outreach youth work, workshop activities, national youth centres, information and advisory services, cultural activities, regional youth work, preventive drug work, youth research and international youth work activities (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.).

Local authorities, youth associations and other organizations offering youth services are responsible in implementing youth work in Finland (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.). These services are financed from funds of the governmental youth budget, which are allocated by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Also other projects dealing with issues like the social empowerment of young people and new forms of youth work and youth culture are subsidized. (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d. .)

Finnish youth workers have different kinds of qualifications from secondary vocational level and higher education. Youth work qualifications can be gained via apprenticeship training or at universities of applied sciences, for instance in the Degree Program in Youth Work and Civic Activity. Some youth workers have a university education with a Master´s degree in Youth Education, Youth Work or Youth Research. Furthermore, more general degrees are also possible, like a Master´s degree in Social Services or Psychology. (Finnish Ministry of Education 2006, p. 25.)

Youth work is the subject of the Youth Act (72/2006), which defines the objectives and values of Finnish youth work and policy. The aim of the act is to support young people's growth and independence, promote their active citizenship, foster their social empowerment and improve their living conditions. (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture 2006, p. 1.) The Government Decree on Youth Work and Policy (103/2006) extends the Youth Act with additional guides for implementing the program (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d. .)

Although gender-sensitive working practices should be applied in all youth facilities, there are some youth facilities in Finland which have specialized in promoting gender equality. One example is "Poikien Talo" ("Boys´ House") as part of the Kallio Youth Association in Helsinki. By means of different activities, this youth facility offers boys and young men the opportunity to reflect on what it means to be a boy, and to try out and acquire new skills according to personal preferences (Poikien Talo n.d.). The following sections first

define gender-sensitive youth work, and then introduce its objectives, working practices and strategies.

3.5 Definition of Gender-Sensitive Youth Work

Gender-sensitive youth work opposes restraining gender roles and aims to offers adolescents a broad variety of options, experiences and activities to try and choose from. Working gender-sensitively means being aware of existing gender stereotypes and roles, and having theoretical knowledge about their forming, as well as their impacts on individuals. At an institutional level, structures and educational practices are evaluated critically to ensure gender equality. This includes considering the range of activities offered to male, female, transgender and other service users. One-sided and gendered working practices are challenged. (Walter 2005, p. 54.)

As an example, male teenagers should have more options to choose from than various sports activities, while girls should have choices beyond the traditional cooking evenings and handicraft clubs. Instead of assuming that all boys and all girls have similar interests, services and activities are determined by the individual needs and interests of each adolescent – irrespective of their gender (Sielert 2002, p. 88; Walter 2005, p. 54). Gender differences are not regarded as natural, but as products of different socialisation processes of boys and girls within our culture, which have to be considered in the client work (Stuve 2012, p. 19).

3.6 Objectives of Gender-Sensitive Youth Work

One important objective of gender-sensitive youth work is to foster individual diversity. Thus, young people can develop their identities and engage in social interactions without restraints due to gender norms and other stereotypings (Debus 2012, p. 150). Therefore, especially 'unusual' behaviours, which do not conform to stereotypical female or male behaviours, are supported (Stuve & Debus 2012b, p. 38). Therefore, a gender-sensitive approach aims to make gender roles more diverse and flexible (Hertling 2008, pp. 155-156 & p. 163). Adolescents are supported in living their gender and developing their gender identities in a self-determined manner without having to behave like a "real" boy or girl (Cremers 2007, p. 62).

Gender-sensitive youth work also aims to eliminate structural inequalities in institutions. The objective is therefore to assure equal access to pay, physical integrity, sexual self-determination and personal and societal acknowledgment for all adolescents and staff members (Debus 2012, p. 150). In addition, attention is drawn to existing gender inequalities and their origins. Ways and methods are developed to eliminate gender inequalities and to foster reflection about existing gender prejudices and societal expectations towards gendered performances of males and females (Hertling 2008, pp. 155-156).

The overall goal of gender-sensitive pedagogy is to work towards a society where a separation based on gender is not necessary anymore (Hertling 2008, p. 166); thus, where a person is not mostly only regarded as either male or a female with a gender-specific set of behaviours or needs, but as a human with a distinctively individual and personal character.

3.7   Working Practices and Strategies in Gender-Sensitive Youth Work

Working practices

Different practices are applied to reach greater gender-equality and awareness of gender in youth work. A common way is to offer education and training on matters related to gender. A youth centre may for instance organize a series of workshops for male adolescents dealing with what it means to be a boy. Such events can also take place in integrated social work, for instance in the collaboration with schools. Besides, further training on gender-sensitivity in youth work can be offered to professionals. (Sielert 2007, pp. 50-51.)

Another important element of gender-sensitive youth work are advice and counselling activities (Sielert 2007, pp. 50-51.) Some youth facilities have specialized exclusively in the guidance and advocacy work related to gender, like the institution Poikien Talo in Helsinki. Magazines and online services provided by professionals which deal with gender matters can also be useful information sources for adolescents, their parents and youth workers themselves (Sielert 2007, pp. 50-51).

Finally, gender matters can be addressed both directly or indirectly in all kinds of youth work activities (Sielert 2007, pp. 50-51). In general, all pedagogical offers supporting

young people in developing new skills and in gaining new experiences "out of the (gen-der) norm" can be regarded as part of gender-sensitive pedagogy. Examples are the organisation of babysitting courses for boys or football tournaments for girls or mixed groups (Debus 2012, p. 151).

Strategies

Addressing gender roles, gender stereotypes and gender relations in order to raise awareness about inequalities runs a significant risk: by emphasising the differences be-tween genders, the gender gap might get even wider and gender-typical behaviours could be strengthened (Debus 2012, p. 150). As an example, implementing a project with a group of boys might increase their stereotypical masculine behaviours since the boys could feel, in this excusively male company, more pressure to perform or compete with each other; besides, they may use the "girl-free zone" to indulge in masculinity. To avoid such undesired outcomes, specific strategies have been developed in gender-sensitive youth work (Debus 2012, p. 151). The strategy applied in a certain pedagogical offer depends on the overall goal of the activity. As Figure 4 illustrates, there are two main objectives of offers: to foster diversity in ways of acting and behaving, and to adress gender directly to challenge restrictive gender roles (Debus 2012, p. 155).

In activites which foster diversity, opportunities are offered to adolescents to expand their abilities, knowledge and experiences. These offers are mostly gender-neutral, like trail courses, meditation or bike repairing workshops. Under certain circumstances, these offers also require addressing gender directly. (Debus 2012, p. 155.) This could be for instance when adolescents at an information event about professional careers insist that working in a kindergarden or with elderly persons is only a "woman´s thing". Or when at an outdoor weekend with a mixed group of teenagers, the task of making food is pushed on the female participants since "this is just how it´s done". It requires the awareness and competence of youth workers to recognize such problematic situations and to intervene accordingly (Debus 2012, p. 156).

Other pedagogical offerings address gender directly as their main goal. One case where such intervention is necessary would be the exclusion or mobbing of an individual since he does not conform to the stereotype of a strong man, maybe because of a feminine hair cut or due to his fear of skateboarding. Or, if sexist terms and notions are used within the group of teenagers. Besides, any pedagogical activity implemented in a homosocial group setting (a group of only boys or only girls) emphasises gender by its very nature:

the group of adolescents was divided by gender as the main criterium. (Debus 2012, p. 152.)

Therefore, activities that emphasise gender always require a subsequent step of elimination which takes the stress on gender away. This "defusing" can take place by pointing out individual differences within a homosocial group, or making aware the multitude of options in being masculine. (Debus 2012, pp. 153-154.) Figure 4 charts this procedure in more detail.
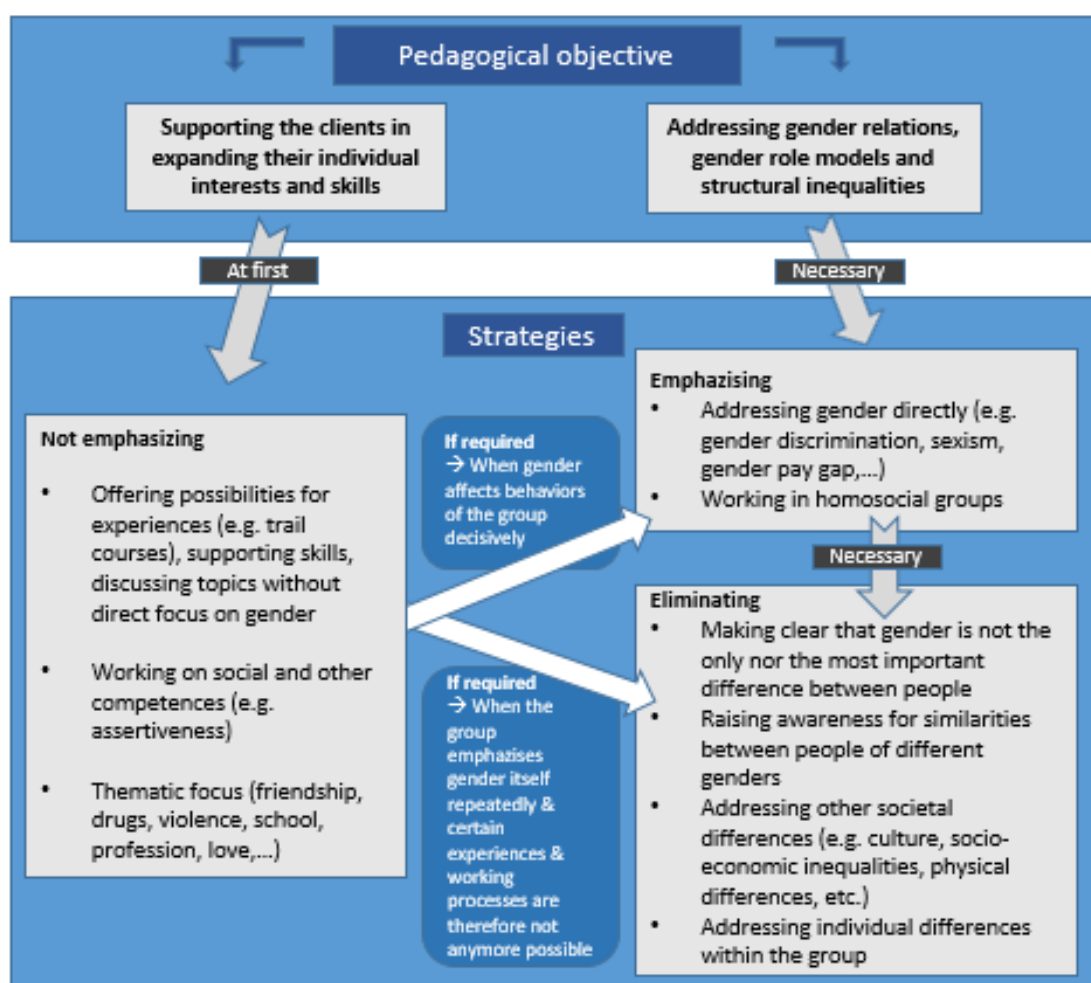
FIGURE 4. Developed by Debus (2012, p. 151), translated and modified by the author

Practical working approaches and methods applied in gender-sensitive youth work with boys and young men can be found in the handbook attached to this thesis.

4   Theoretical Framework

"We are what we think. All that we are arises within our thoughts. With our thoughts, we make the world."

Gautama Buddah (560 – 477 BC) (cited in Pritchard & Woollard 2010, p. 2)

4.1   Social Constructivism

The sociological theory of knowledge of social constructivism serves as the underlying theoretical framework for this thesis project. Social constructivism claims that the concepts and categories which are used in our society are not part of one objective and unquestionable truth or reality, but are created and formed by us ourselves within our community (Marecek, Crawford & Popp 2004, p. 194). Such categories and concepts taken for granted are suicide, schizophrenia, altruism, psychological disorder, childhood, domestic violence, aggression, emotion, morality, as well as gender (Gergen 1985, p. 267-270). As an example, there seems to be a clear understanding in our current Western society about what domestic violence is. Most people seem convinced they know the fine line between rough behaviour in families and violence which can no longer be regarded as an acceptable method of disciplining or as a forgivable banality. Still, this line was set very differently just a few decades ago in our societies, and is still perceived differently in some other cultures. Nevertheless, our grandparents and some people from other cultures were or are in the same way convinced that their understanding of domestic violence is the one and only 'right' one.

Social constructivism is one subcategory of the more general philosophical Theory of Constructivism. While constructivism can be applied to many areas like art, philosophy, mathematics or architecture, social constructivism focuses specifically on social constructs and concepts in the social field. (Pritchard & Woollard 2010, pp. 2-4.) The ideas of constructivism have been developed over a long time, dating back 2000 years in the Eastern world, and at least 300 years in our Western civilisation (Pritchard & Woollard 2010, p. 2).

The core of constructivism is a strong doubt and radical questioning of views on issues related to our everyday life as well as science which are taken for granted. Therefore, constructivism can be regarded as a form of social criticism. (Gergen 1985, p. 267.) The

theory prompts us to look more critically at commonly accepted categories and to scrutinize our understandings and assumptions on how the world appears to be (Gergen 1985, p. 267; Burr 2015, p. 3). It opposes our ability to observe and understand the world objectively and unbiased "as it is" (Gergen 1985, p. 267). In other words, the way we commonly perceive the world around us does necessarily not tell anything about reality or truth per se. Instead, constructivism questions the concept of "one" truth, and therefore also the objectivity of all conventional knowledge (Gergen 1985, pp. 267-268; Burr 2015, p. 2). Instead of being able to find knowledge and truth in our environment, we construct it over time and within our cultures (Pritchard & Woollard 2010, pp. 3-5). Subsequently, our understanding cannot be regarded any closer to truth than other ways of perceiving (Burr 2015, p. 4).

Key ideas of constructivism have been adapted by learning theories including the behaviourist or stimulus-response theories related to Pavlov, Watson and Skinner, which aim to explain how our learning takes place (Pritchard & Woollard 2010, p. 4). Also Piaget´s theory of constructivist learning is closely linked to constructivism (Gergen 1985, p. 266) since it deals with ways children construct their own realities (Pritchard & Woollard 2010, p. 5). Behaviourism emphasises the importance of our environment in influencing our ways of behaving and perceiving the world around us (Gergen 1985, p. 269). In addition, the Social Learning Theory by Bandura regards social interaction as essential to our learning and knowledge acquisition (Pritchard & Woollard 2010, p. 19). What these learning theories have in common with the Theory of Constructivism is that they regard our understanding, knowledge and ways of perceiving reality as constructed – either by individuals or communities, but always based on accumulated information and its interpretation in relation to previous experiences (Pritchard & Woollard 2010, p. 9).

Social constructivism can be regarded as a development and subset of constructivist learning theories (Pritchard & Woollard 2010, p. 4). But while constructivist learning theories mostly focus on how individuals construct their reality through observation and experience, social constructivism emphasizes that our reality is constructed through social contact, shared social activities and context (Pritchard & Woollard 2010, pp. 4-7 & 19). While Social Constructivists regard knowledge as a social product, they view learning as a social process (Pritchard & Woollard 2010, p. 9).

Constructed concepts also have the power to direct and change our reality as a self-fulfilling prophecy, as the following example shows: in our Western society, old age is

mostly associated with aspects like poor health, poverty and loneliness, and therefore often regarded as something negative and unpleasant. (Hothersall & Maas-Lowit 2010, pp. 98 – 102). The high level of experience and life skills developed have barely any value in our culture. This might be related to our capitalistic system in which people are valued in relation to their economic performance. (Hothersall & Maas-Lowit 2010, p. 111.) Older people are often regarded as a challenge for our society, mostly due to the pensions to be paid. According to recent studies, the attitudes towards old age, by both ourselves and the society around us, can essentially influence our well-being when growing old. People that regard old age as a negative phase of life, feel mentally worse and suffer more from physical problems than those with a more optimistic view towards old age. (Beck 2009.)

Since we can at least partly influence or construct our reality, Social Constructionists emphasize the importance of stepping back and evaluating critically our ways of seeing and understanding the world (Burr 2015 p. 2). We are requested to ponder on the social origins of taken-for-granted assumptions, considering also social, moral, political and economic institutions, as well as the symbol system of language as possible constructors of our ideas and perceptions (Gergen 1985, p. 267-268).

Next to community and culture, the historical context needs to be considered when aiming to understand societal concepts and perceptions: Burr (2015, p. 4) states that our concepts are "*products of culture and history, dependent upon the particular social and economic arrangements prevailing in that culture at that time.*" Therefore, social constructivism stresses the impact of cultural, historical and environmental factors influencing the way individuals perceive reality (Pritchard & Woollard 2010, p. 9).

For clarity and summary, Figure 5 presents the relations of social constructivism to other theories, points out mutual influences and explains briefly the key ideas.
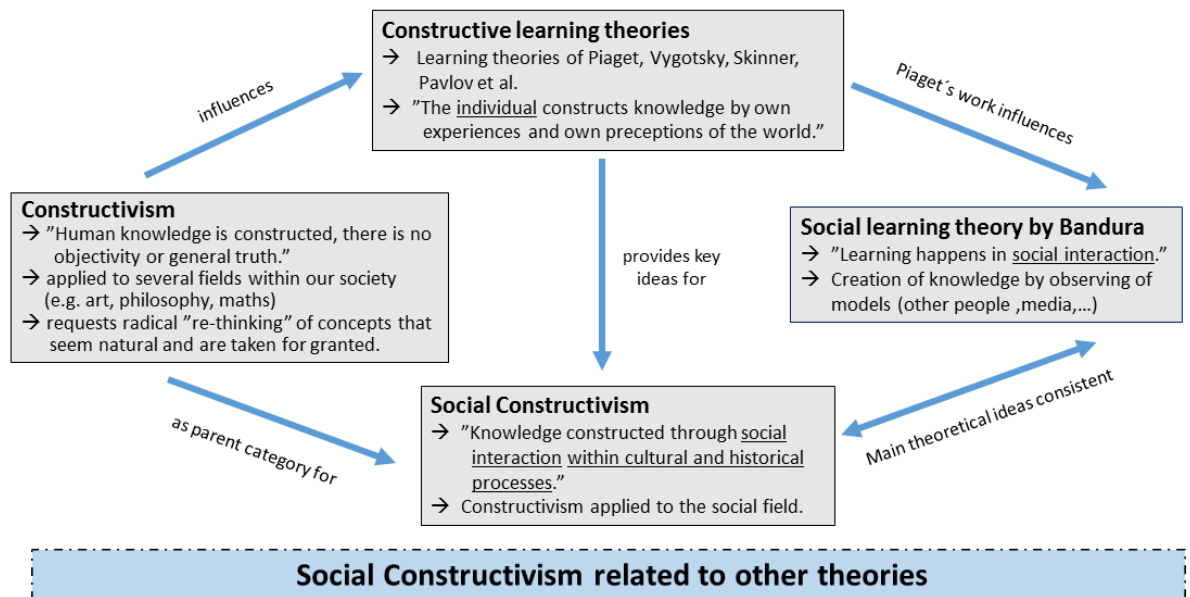
FIGURE 5. Key relations of Social Constructivism to other theories

4.2   On Gender and Social Constructivism

Social constructivism supports our understanding of gender as a product of our culture and historical context. As discussed in section 3.2.1, masculine and feminine behaviors are not natural but learned (Paechter 2007, p. 14; Butler in Burr 2015, p. 128). Social constructivism describes social interaction as essential to the creation of concepts, also related to gender: Stuve and Debus (2012b, p. 34) point out that only in the performance of gender in social interaction, and by its perception by oneself and others are masculinity and femininity created. Part of this performance are certain ways of walking, dressing, talking and gesturing. Essential is that the performance of gender happens repeatedly, over a long time and among many people: this way, gender gains its solidity and naturalness, like something that has always been there, or is inborn (Burr 2015, pp. 128-129).

During our socialization as members of the society we live in, we become better at reading and interpreting gender performances of others and learn how to perform ourselves in different situations (Paechter 2007, p. 33). This knowledge on gender is mostly internalized which makes it difficult for us to describe how it is to be or behave like a "real" man or woman. Still, we immediately notice, and respond with irritation, if someone does not perform according to the typical gender norms. (Stuve & Debus 2012b, p. 33.)

Since social constructs depend on culture, gender is perceived and performed differently in different cultures and communities (Paechter 2007 p. 14). A man in Finland presents

himself differently compared to a man in Afghanistan, Namibia or Germany. Differences are also noticeable between social classes (subcultures) and generations (history). Burr (2015, p. 128) speaks of "*powerful prescriptions of prevailing discourses related to gender*" which make us behave 'appropriately' in order to fit into the society in which we live or from which we came.

Social constructivism criticizes the current concept of gender since it implies the existence of just two gender categories (Burr 2015, p. 3). This leads to personal restraints for individuals, and marginalization of those who do not naturally fit into these two categories (Hertling 2008, p. 66). Thus, the strict norms of gender suppress diversity as there is only limited tolerance of anything and anyone outside these norms. Subsequently, social constructivism requests that we challenge the seemingly natural and opposite categories of man and woman. Since feminine and masculine behaviors are imposed on us, they are also changeable. (Burr 2015, p. 3.) Besides, social constructivism challenges us to ponder whether gender should be regarded as the key difference between people and whether being either male or female makes us as different from each other as we are often (made to) believe. Therefore, by applying the ideas of social constructivism, we are invited to consider other features besides gender as more relevant to the development of our identities, features like social class or ethnicity. (Burr 2015, p. 3.)

4.3   Social Constructivism and Gender-Sensitive Youth Work

The Theory of Social Constructivism can help to create youth work practices which are more reflective and sensitive towards gender and its impacts on young people and society in general: social constructivism makes us aware of social concepts like gender, and offers then answers on how they can be reconfigured. Therefore, social constructivism invites professionals to critically address the impacts of social constructs in their chosen working practices, as well as on their clients. Thus, social phenomena are observed more attentively and questioned more critically, rather than regarded as something that 'is just as it is'. Especially the role of professionals in interactions with clients is examined carefully to assess what kinds of social concepts, ideas and expectations are conveyed, accepted, supported or neglected.

The fact that social constructivism regards social concepts as flexible and changeable has essential consequences for the practice of professionals in social services: First, it requests more responsibility. One cannot lean back and regard things as determined

when there is the possibility for change. Since social concepts are not naturally bound, but are re-created every day and developed further in our social interactions, we have the possibility to actively challenge them. This applies to social service professionals in particular: since their work consist mainly out of social interaction, they constantly shape social constructs when working with clients – whether they are aware of that or not.

Youth workers have special responsibilities as they work with people who are in the middle of constructing their identities and views towards the world; therefore, they are particularly responsive and sensitive to outside influences.

5   On the Workshop

This chapter describes the planning and implementation process of the workshop on gender-sensitive youth work with boys and young men, implemented in June 2016 at the venue of R3. As a supplement, a handbook was developed with key information and practical tips on the topic. The handbook was provided to R3 after the workshop.

5.1   On the Application of Social Constructivism

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the youth workers at R3 felt that they had not reflected on gender sufficiently. The services they offered to male adolescents were not diverse enough, but mostly typical "boys´ things" like football events or game evenings. The staff felt unsure about the actual interests of the boys, especially since many youths attended offered activities only sporadically, especially in the long-term. Besides, the excessive performance of masculinity by some of the male teenagers added to the confusion on how to best work with them. The situation seemed gridlocked: The male service users did not participate much in the activities offered; the youth workers wanted to improve the situation, but did not know how, and felt frustrated since things were not progressing.

Looking at such a situation through the lens of social constructivism can be very beneficial: social constructivism invites to challenge conventional practices by assessing why and how we do and perceive things the way we do, and by making us ponder alternatives ways of acting (Gergen 1985, pp. 269-271). In the case of R3, this means assessing the working practices with the teenage boys, and to re-evaluate their underlying reasons.

It seemed that the activities offered at R3 complied with stereotypically assumed interests and needs of boys, and therefore aligned with traditional perceptions of masculinity. Social constructivism encourages to reflect on our perceptions of social concepts like masculinity since these often direct our actions without us noticing (Gergen 1985, pp. 267-268). Therefore, it was essential for the youth workers in R3 to reflect on their attitudes and assumptions towards masculinity, and to evaluate how these translate into working practices.

Still, reflection is not enough: social constructivism also emphasises the importance of the acquisition of new knowledge and information on social concepts we deal with in everyday life (Gergen 1985, p. 269); this way, it is possible to evaluate whether our assumptions and related actions match the actual state and requirements of reality. Therefore, it was important for R3 to receive up-to-date research data on male adolescents in Finland: what are they struggling with, and how are they doing in different areas of life? Based on this information, R3 could assess whether the services they offer would meet the current needs and interests of boys. Besides, additional knowledge and information on gender – above all on masculinity – supported challenging assumptions. For instance, becoming aware of the narrowness of the context within which boys have to build their gender identities, could lead to considerations at R3 on whether their pedagogical offerings either strengthen traditional concepts of masculinity unintentionally, or help to disburden male teenagers from societal restraints and pressures.

The aim of social constructivism to break down the one-dimensional concepts of gender and search for more diverse ways of being (Gergen 1985, p. 267; Burr 2015, p. 3), could inspire R3 to see beyond conventional working routines and experiment with new methods. This could resolve their gridlocked situation regarding the work with boys, and bring a fresh twist to their work. To achieve this, it was decided together with R3 to implement a workshop on gender-sensitive youth work related to male adolescents.

5.2   Fostering Awareness by Means of a Workshop

According to social constructivism, knowledge is constructed, solidified and reconstructed in social interaction, and as a result of it (Pritchard & Woollard 2010, pp. 45-48). A workshop format lends itself to such processes since it offers professionals the space to delve into a given subject matter and to exchange related ideas, information and ex-

periences. Furthermore, a workshop offers the possibility of combining active participation, including reflections and joint discussions, with short lectures providing new insights and knowledge – which are all essential to developing new approaches towards the subject matter.

A handbook, handed over to the participants after the workshop, offers an additional possibility to solidify the knowledge gained in the workshop.

5.3   Objectives and Methods of the Workshop

The workshop supports the main objectives of this thesis by aiming to raise awareness and provide information on gender and gender-sensitivity in the work with male teenagers at R3. Based on the ideas of social constructivism, the workshop aims to encourage the participants to evaluate and reflect critically on their current knowledge, as well as on their internalized values and assumptions on gender. Therefore, one key method of the workshop is reflection. Short presentations in between aim to offer the possibility of comparing previous information and assumptions with up-to-date knowledge on gender and gender-sensitive youth work. Subsequent discussions should make sense of the new information and link it to the practical working life at R3. Furthermore, the new inputs should provide the foundation for critical evaluation of conventional methods and practices in the work with male adolescents. In addition, the workshop participants are invited to ponder possible new approaches in youth work which could increase gender-sensitivity and best support the development of teenage boys.

The handbook provided offers the possibility of dealing with the subject matter beyond the workshop. It also aims to make the information more concrete and applicable by offering practical tips on how to implement gender-sensitive youth work with boys. It includes reading recommendations for further study, as well as two separate self-reflection forms. The first focuses on the working practices of the youth worker in relation to gender, the second on their own gender socialisation.

5.4   Planning Phase

While it had been challenging to find information on gender-sensitive youth work with males, it turned out to be even more difficult to locate a working life partner who was

interested in the topic. As most literature and research studies about gender-sensitivity in youth work only related to girls and young women, it seemed that most youth facilities were not interested in focusing on gender-sensitivity towards males.

As an exception to this rule, the eventual working life partner R3 expressed great interest in improving their working practices towards greater gender-sensitivity. The fact that the institution had not found enough time to deal with the topic of gender-sensitive youth work, but was still very aware of this shortcoming and keen to improve the situation, made R3 a very suitable collaboration partner for this thesis project. Besides, the main client group of R3 were male adolescents.

It was jointly decided that a workshop and a handbook about gender-sensitive youth work with male adolescents would best equip R3 with the necessary resources to improve their working practices. Specific needs and wishes of R3 were identified and considered during the planning and implementation phase of the workshop. The institution attached importance to sufficient time for discussion during the workshop, as well as for the acquisition of sufficient theoretical knowledge on gender. In addition, special focus should be put on the situation of boys with an immigration background since they constituted the main client group of R3.

Different reflection methods were prepared to be implemented by the youth workers during as well as after the workshop. Besides, key information and hand-on tips on gender-sensitive youth work practices were summarized in a handbook to be provided to the participants after the workshop. For further development and evaluation of the workshop, a feedback form was designed to be filled in by the participants after the event.

Further arrangements with the working life partner concerned the English language skills of the participants, their pre-knowledge on gender, the time schedule of the workshop, the group size of participants, necessary devices like a computer and projector, and the venue of the event.

Finally, a PowerPoint Presentation was prepared to guide the workshop and to make the presented information more accessible through its visual representation.

5.5   Ethical Considerations

Since the workshop deals with a topic which is closely linked to a person´s identity, their values, internalized ideas and views, it could arouse many emotions and uncomfortable feelings. Therefore, ethical considerations are important to ensure the well-being of the participants.

All participants were aware that their participation in the workshop was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the event at any point. In addition, the participants were informed about the purposes and objectives of the workshop, and the usage of the results of the event. Assurances were given that no individual could be identified in the thesis paper. Furthermore, private experiences or views on issues were shared only on a voluntary basis during the workshop, and not mentioned in the report in a way that the person stating it could be identified.

The participants´ practical and theoretical knowledge and experiences were regarded as valuable resources which offered a great starting point for discussions and a wide repertoire of practical examples from the working life. Instead of wagging fingers or teaching, the goal was to explore and discuss together, and to develop as a group a new level of awareness on gender and gender-sensitive youth work. Therefore, it was important to create an atmosphere in which all views and thoughts were welcome, where doubts and disagreements could be expressed freely and which would be regarded as conductive to delving deeper into the subject matter.

Since the reflection on one´s own socialisation process and personal working style is very private, a right balance had to be found between reflecting in the group setting, and self-reflection. For this reason, the reflection forms were handed to the participants to be considered at a quieter location.

Finally, it was ensured to that no one was excluded due to limited language skills. Even though it was assured beforehand that all participants would feel comfortable in communicating in the English language, it was still emphasised during the workshop that all comments and questions could also be communicated in Finnish.

5.6   Implementation

5.6.1   Conditions of the Workshop

The workshop took place on 1 June 2016 from 10 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. at the venue of R3 in Vaskivuorentie 25, Vantaa. The manager of R3 invited the participants and provided them with the requisite information on the workshop. In addition to the workshop facilitator, four participants attended: two social workers with Bachelor´s degrees (in Finnish: *sosionomi*), one social worker with a Master´s degree, and one social services student who was about to implement his internship at R3. The group was mixed with two men and three women attending. At least two people had cultural origins other than Finnish. The group was also heterogeneous in terms of age, ranging from early 20s to nearly 50. The total duration of the workshop was 3.5 hours. The main language of the event was English, although some terms were given in Finnish. The running of the workshop was supported by a PowerPoint Presentation.

5.6.2   Process Organisation and Workshop Procedure

The workshop was divided by content into six sessions of different lengths. The individual sessions either started with introductory discussions or reflective exercises on the topic at hand. These allowed the participants to gain an initial awareness of their presumptions and pre-knowledge. Subsequently, a presentation and input session followed which introduced current knowledge on the topic, related theories and real world research data. A follow-up discussion made sense of the new information, compared it to previous knowledge and ideas of the participants, and connected it to practical experiences from their working lives. A detailed schedule containing the key content, objectives, methods used, and the planned duration of each session, can be found in the appendix.

When referring in the following text to a participant, the pronoun "he" and the term "youth worker" is used, regardless of the actual gender or working of the person. This is done to ensure confidentiality.

After the opening (session 1) with short introductions and general information on the workshop, session 2 starts the topic by dealing with sex, gender and social constructivism. The introducing discussion revealed that most youth workers were already aware of the differences between sex and gender, and knew about the constructed character of gender. But, no participant had a clear understanding of gender in relation to boys and

men. The subsequent presentation focused mostly on defining the terms sex, gender and sexual dualism, and introducing the Theory of Social Constructivism and its relations to gender. These concepts evoked many thoughts: in the follow-up discussion, the participants described many related examples out of their lives. One participant described how his teenage son was eating only the meat dish at school, even if he did not like it on some days – choosing the vegetarian option was regarded as "uncool" within his teenage clique. Another participant described that he had been regarded repeatedly as homosexual since certain features in his character did not match the typical heterosexual behaviour – which lead to irritation in others, and finally also in himself due to of their comments.

Session 3 dealt with masculinity and its impact on male adolescents. After an exercise in which everyone pondered by himself on common assumptions and gender expectations towards males, all thoughts were collected on one poster. The result was a large collection of a multitude of character traits and abilities that are expected from a "real" man (see Figure 6). One participant expressed his surprise about the amount of societal demands towards men by stating that it must be tough to be a man. A presentation on masculinity in our western world and its impacts on male adolescents followed. Subsequently, extracts from different media like advertisements and films showing boys and men were analysed from the point of view of how males are represented and what messages related to masculinity are conveyed to adolescents. After the input on masculinity, the participants recognized many aspects of traditional masculinity expressed in the images – mostly as extremely exaggerated. The images stimulated a lot of discussion, also regarding the usage of media in youth work. One youth worker mentioned that he had enjoyed watching actions films like Rambo during his youth. Should youth workers still allow adolescents to watch such films? We concluded that it was fine as long as the content was discussed critically with the adolescents afterwards, and if films with alternative kinds of masculinities were also offered.
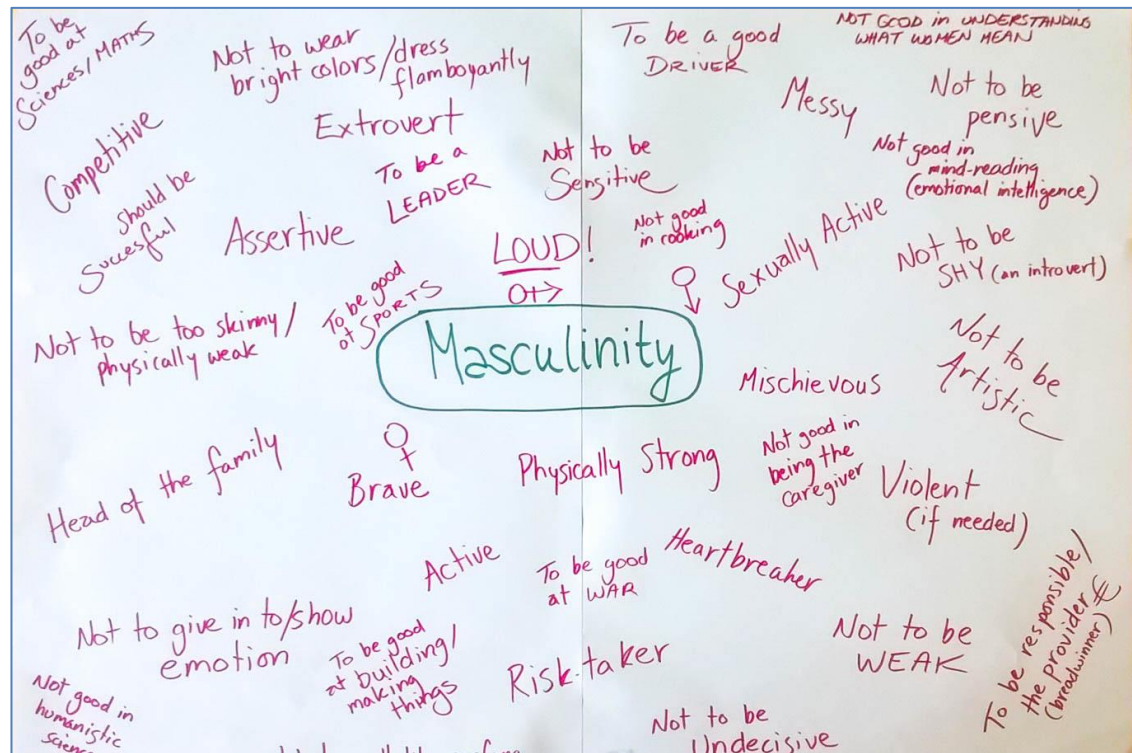
FIGURE 6. Group work on masculinity during the workshop on 1 June 2016

Session 4 contained information on the current life situation of male teenagers in Finland. The information was mostly based on the Finnish School Health Promotion Study 2013 (Matikka et al. 2015) since it focuses particularly on the well-being of adolescents with an immigration background. The aim was to create an understanding of the challenges that Finnish boys currently face and to contextualize these issues with the societal pressures on boys to perform in line with traditional masculinity. Especially the high amount of substance abuse, experiences of violence and sexual abuse among immigrant boys triggered a lot of discussion. All youth workers stated that they were very surprised about these results. They had not noticed in their client work that so many boys struggled so much. This was interpreted in our discussion as a result of the inability of many boys to share problems since it would reveal their vulnerability, and due to our misconception that boys would manage anyway somehow by themselves.

Session 5 aimed to collate the insights gained in the previous sessions, and to develop approaches and methods in youth work which would take gender and gender stereotypes into account, and foster individual diversity. In the initial discussion, some youth workers regarded it as important that pedagogical activities outside the gender norm would be offered. In the following presentation, possible gender-sensitive working prac-

tices were introduced and in a subsequent discussion evaluated regarding their applicability at R3. Some participants stated that it seemed difficult to imagine how their male clients would engage for instance in yoga exercises. One participant declared that the approaches of gender-sensitive youth work seemed very exciting and inspiring, but still difficult to grasp since they were so different from conventional approaches. A lively discussion developed about possible new pedagogical offerings at R3. The key questions seemed to be where to start and how to motivate the male teenagers to participate. It was discussed that such changes could not happen by starting with activities that were "radically out of the ordinary", like yoga for boys. Instead, a slow, but steady increase of more and more "untypical" activities was regarded as the best approach. One youth worker also noted that patience and stamina were needed to start such a process since in the first yoga lesson no adolescents might turn up, but maybe there would be one or two in the second or third lesson; word of mouth might reach more boys if the activity was regarded as worthwhile and interesting by others. This discussion brought up many different ideas for possible gender-sensitive activities, like the possibility of a regular toddlers´ group for fathers and their babies at R3. One participant stated his intention to offer some gender-sensitive activities beginning the following autumn.

Another discussion dealt with the "right" way of dealing with gender-typical behaviours of adolescents and activities that support gender-conforming behaviours. Should football still be offered to boys? Or would we just support masculine behavioural patterns and stereotypical interests? "*A tricky question*" stated one participant. At first, it seemed very difficult to find good answers to this. It became clear that several participants had understood that gender-sensitive youth work meant forbidding behaviours and activities that supported gender-stereotypical patterns. It was then discussed that working gender-sensitively does not mean taking away, but giving. Therefore, activities like football can be supported, but next to a multitude of other options. One participant added that football did not need as much attention and encouragement from youth workers like atypical activities; many boys would play football anyway, even without extrinsic motivation. It became obvious in a debate on how to react to strong displays of masculinity (like machismo) by adolescents, that these behaviours are also to be accepted as long as they do not harm, hinder or exclude others who behave in different ways –this also means diversity of gender.

Session 6, the one to close the workshop, focused on reflecting together about what ideas and feelings the new inputs and discussions had evoked and what was gained

from the workshop. One participant stated that he was relieved about the realisation that gender-sensitive youth work did add options and activities rather than limit them. All participants stated that they had gained a lot of new information and awareness on the topic, and that they could imagine applying some of the gender-sensitive methods introduced in their work. One participant still doubted slightly whether their male service users would participate in activities outside the gender norm, and was wondering how to best motivate them. Still, all participants described the workshop as very useful for themselves and for their work with clients.

6   Data Analysis and Findings

The results of this study consist of documented comments and feedback by the participants during the workshop, the feedback forms returned after the event, as well as the author´s own insights gained while facilitating the workshop. Analysing these findings provides information about whether and how the workshop supported the aims of this thesis: to increase the awareness and knowledge of the youth workers at R3 regarding gender-sensitivity in their work with male teenagers.

6.1   Feedback Provided by the Workshop Participants

Since the comments and feedback expressed during the workshop and the feedback forms overlap considerably, they are combined and jointly handled in this section. All feedback forms were filled completely, and the template and the answers can be found in the appendix.

Findings

All youth workers rated the topic of the workshop as very important for their work, and most had thought about the need for such a topic before. Two participants justified the importance of the topic by stating that they worked mostly with young men; one participant regarded the topic a central issue in his work, while another explained that social workers encountered the topic on many occasions, which made it important to deal with. One youth worker reported that due to time constraints there had not been any reflection in the team at R3 on working methods and gender.

It turned out that no youth worker had received sufficient training on the topic. Two youth workers stated that they had perceived no training at all, one mentioned that some basic theory on gender was discussed during his studies - although mostly relating to females. Only one professional had participated in training on gender that at least "*touched upon male behaviour*". The discussions during the workshop showed that most youth workers were at least somewhat informed about the concepts of gender and sex, as well as their differences. Still, there was only very little knowledge on masculinity and gender related to males.

All participants expressed that the workshop had increased their awareness and knowledge on the gender and gender-sensitive youth work with males. Besides, all participants regarded the workshop as very helpful for their work. Three out of four youth workers stated that they found the discussions in the group very important and beneficial. Two social workers suggested additional time for discussion as a possible improvement to the workshop.

All participants rated the combination of methods consisting of input, reflection exercises and discussions as important in dealing with the subject matter. One youth worker described the combination of theoretical framework, statistics and practical examples as the most helpful and interesting part of the workshop. Another participant appreciated above all the interactive and reflective approach of the workshop.

Analysis

The feedback and comments of the participants confirm the significance of the workshop topic for the youth workers. Still, the youth workers had barely received any training on the issue. This correlates with the hypothesis of this study that there is a great need for improved training of youth workers on gender-sensitive working practices with males. Still, most youth workers did have some basic understanding of gender theory, but no knowledge about how to apply it to the work with male teenagers. Especially the concept of masculinity and its impact on male adolescents was mostly unknown. It therefore requires particular focus.

The findings also show that most youth workers at R3 had somewhat considered the need for gender-sensitive youth work with males, also before the workshop; this suggest that there had already been some awareness on the issue, but it did not translate into working practices.

According to the received feedback, the workshop setting was well chosen for achieving the objectives of the thesis: all participants felt that they had gained better awareness and new knowledge on the topic. Besides, all youth workers perceived the workshop as helpful for their work.

Dealing with the social concept of gender in social interaction (discussion) and in a combination with joint reflection and the provision of new information – as suggested by the Theory of Social Constructivism – was appreciated by the participants and lead to positive commenting. Especially the method of discussion was described as very beneficial to develop jointly new approaches towards gender and gender-sensitive working practices. Based on the received feedback, the methods used in the workshop were therefore well chosen and successfully applied.

6.2   Personal Evaluation

Like the participants, the author also regards that the workshop - including the methods applied as part of it - achieved the objectives of the thesis.

The method of combining reflective discussions and exercises (social interaction) with sessions of new input had been developed from the ideas of social constructivism. The positive feedback perceived on the workshop confirmed that the theoretical framework supported the development of the approach, but social constructivism served also in other ways. The knowledge gained through social constructivism supported observing and evaluating the happenings during the workshop: It explained, for instance, why the participants could – without having studied about or reflected on masculinity before – immediately define masculinity by listing a multitude of expected male traits and behaviours. And despite the group had never shared opinions on this issue before, there were no discrepancies regarding the listed items. Some participants expressed their surprise about how many assumptions they had detected regarding masculinity. Assessing this through the glasses of social constructivism reveals how many internalised assumptions of social concepts we accumulate during our socialization processes without being aware of it. If there would be no new inputs, no "real" knowledge, there would be nothing else to direct our actions than these internalised perceptions. Therefore, exercises like the one described above were very valuable as they made the workshop participants aware

their internalised "knowledge", and showed how important reflection is in avoiding undesired influences on one´s working practices.

In addition, the influence of internalized assumptions became obvious when observing how difficult it seemed for some participants at first to warm up to the idea of offering activities like meditation or yoga to male teenagers. Some participants showed at first great reluctance and doubt, but which then became less and less the longer we pondered on the possibilities. This showed how deeply assumptions about social concepts are rooted, what barriers they can create in our minds, and once more how important it is to reflect on them to see beyond these conventional patterns.

The active and in-depth discussions of the workshop revealed great interest in part of the youth workers in R3 to deal with the subject of gender and gender-sensitive youth work. The discussions were also characterized by considerable openness. The participants seemed eager to gain new knowledge on the subject matter, and contributed with many valuable insights and experiences from their working lives. Thereby, the method of starting a session with an introductory discussion to reflect on existing assumptions on the topic, then providing theoretical information and ending the session with a follow-up discussion, proved to be a very useful one. This approach allowed interaction and participation next to phases of receiving input, which made the workshop also more interesting.

The discussions proved important in pointing out when an introduced idea was misunderstood or more information on the issue was needed. Some approaches of gender-sensitive pedagogy seemed to be at first confusing and bore the risk of creating misunderstandings: For instance, some youth workers had initially understood that working gender-sensitively meant to forbid or suppress gender-stereotypical activities and behaviours. Therefore, it was important to make clear that a gender-sensitive approach does not take options away, but only adds new ones. This notion was important since one youth worker said that it was a relief from the pressure that every pedagogical action needs to be first tested on whether it would support traditional gender roles. Besides, the idea of gender-sensitive youth work can never be grasped when its key value of diversity is not understood – and diversity includes traditional as well as modern expressions of gender. Therefore, it was very important to pick up this point once more within the group in order to foster real understanding of what gender-sensitive youth work aims to achieve.

Still, a 3.5-hour workshop and an introductory handbook are only starting points in a new understanding of gender, as well as knowledge on how to implement gender-sensitive working practices. In this short time, it was not possible to reflect and discuss all related and relevant topics in depth. Still, it showed that even a short workshop can arouse the interest in the subject matter, as well as support awareness amongst participants that there is indeed need for further research and training. A well-selected handout and subsequent independent self-reflection exercises support the participants by providing information and possibilities to reflect even outside the workshop itself.

6.3 Challenges

As mentioned before, finding a working life partner was a very difficult process. It required many emails to several youth centres in Helsinki, until finally, R3 found the topic very worthwhile.

During the implementation of the workshop, the amount of short time was the main constraint. To achieve the desired outcomes, it was necessary to provide sufficient knowledge on the subject matter, as well as to have enough space for reflection and joint discussion. Besides, the topics discussed in the workshop evoked many thoughts, emotions and contradictions which needed to be dealt with. Finding the right balance between allowing the discussions to flow, but keeping to the schedule, was challenging.

6.4 Usage of the Project for R3

R3 benefited from the workshop by gaining new awareness and knowledge on gender and gender-sensitivity in youth work. Next to theoretical background knowledge, practical approaches were also dealt with, which could be directly translated to their work with male service users. For R3, this approach was particularly important since their main service user group consists of male adolescents. Specific attention was also paid to working approaches for the work with immigrant boys since R3 is a multicultural youth facility.

The youth facility managed to make up for their shortcomings by being able to reflect on gender and their working practices during the workshop. If desired, they could even delve

deeper into the subject matter: the handbook can be used for further information, and offers various practices and methods which lead towards more gender-sensitivity in the work with boys. It could be used individually, as part of a team meeting, or be passed on to those youth workers who did not participate in the workshop.

The PowerPoint Presentation which guided the workshop was also shared with R3. This makes it possible for R3 to implement such an event again in future, for instance when there are new team members, or when the working situation requires re-evaluation of the current approach. R3 has already expressed the intent to go through the PowerPoint Presentation with the whole team.

All material used in the workshop was provided to R3 digitally, so that it could be duplicated and adapted to the specific needs of R3. Future employees and practical trainees can thus benefit from it. In addition, the practical trainee who participated in the workshop expressed his wish to focus, during his internship in fall 2016, principally on the practical application of the gender-sensitive working approaches discussed in the workshop.

Finally, though no less importantly, the R3 team gained fresh impetus inspiration to try something new in their working practices with the adolescents.

7   Learning outcome of the author

I have gained a great amount of new knowledge and awareness throughout the life cycle of this thesis project. The engagement with the concept of gender has changed my view towards my environment in many ways. It was a big surprise to realize to what extent traditional gender roles still affect and dictate our lives in several areas – they can be found in most media, like advertisements or films (a very conservative medium, when considered from the perspective of gender), in fashion, in our roles at work and in intimate relationships, and even in very small things as in our ways of walking, sitting or greeting one another, and in what kind of opposing smells typical deodorants for men and women should have. Anyone who starts paying attention to gender will find it in almost all walks of life. Perceiving traditional masculinity and femininity as opposing forces is still very dominant in our world, and also made me aware of how strong the pressure to conform to these norms still is, and the great range of opportunity it takes away from all of us.

While still working on this thesis, it made me sad to experience at my current internship at an orphanage, how a little boy arrived at the institution with very beautiful shoulder-length hair, and what immense conflict this immediately triggered: the other children started to tease him since he looked "*like a girl*", while the social workers fought back and forth with the boy´s father to get permission to cut his hair – "*since no boy wears his hair this long*". A ruling by the youth court finally solved the conflict by granting permission to cut the boy´s hair to a *"normal hair style"*– against the will of the boy who loved the hair since his dad apparently had a similar style. Only after the hair was cut at the hair-dresser (who also commented on it negatively), did the child stop asking why the privilege of wearing long hair is exclusive to by girls and women. It is quite probable, that he now will keep his hair short- after having experienced the drama that can ensue when not conforming to the gender norm. This is one way in which socialisation conditions us.

Having experienced that such issues still have the power to create huge conflicts within our otherwise so advanced world, reinforced my opinion that it is necessary to work to-wards a world which no longer distinguishes between "boys´ things" and "girls´ things", but which offers more diversity for everyone. This experience again showed that in the field of social services there also remains much reflection on gender to be done.

The insights gained during this thesis project will benefit my future work with children and adolescents immensely. Understanding the relevance of this subject matter increased my feeling of responsibility to actively contribute towards a more gender-sensitive ap-proach in youth work. Therefore, I aim to follow the suggestion of my working life partner to implement workshops on gender-sensitive youth work as part of my profession. Still, I have also learnt that societal change regarding social concepts proceeds very slowly. Thus, a lot of patience is required, as well as the awareness that we can only plant seeds, while having the trust that one day there will be a society in which no human will be restricted or excluded based on their sexual origin or its expression.

8 Discussion

The aim of this project was to increase the awareness and knowledge at R3 regarding gender-sensitive youth work with male adolescents. This objective is based on two as-sumptions: First, that youth workers are often not sufficiently informed, reflective or trained regarding this issue; secondly, that there is a specific need for gender-sensitive

youth work for boys and young men. Both assumptions were confirmed during this thesis project.

The current research data from several studies on Finnish boys showed that in many areas of life boys are doing worse than girls. Especially the high suicide rates among boys and young men, but also the large number of boys suffering from long-lasting loneliness call for additional measurements in youth work.

In addition, the lack of information and training of youth workers regarding gender-sensitive working practices with males became evident during this thesis project. The extensive research done at the start of the project revealed that there is little literature and barely any further education offered on the topic. This should increase the value of the workshop offered to the working life partner as part of this thesis, but it instead turned out to be very challenging to find a youth institution interested in participating. This was probably not since there would have been no need, but rather due to a lack of awareness regarding the relevance of the topic. In addition, the feedback provided by R3 later confirmed the lack of training of youth workers about gender-sensitive youth work with males. These findings underline once more the significance of the thesis topic.

This study also shows that a workshop about the topic can be a suitable setting for increasing awareness and knowledge among youth workers. Still, it became evident that attention must be paid to the possible misunderstandings regarding gender-sensitive approaches that might occur. Discussions in the workshop with R3 revealed that one possible fear among youth workers is that gender-sensitive approaches exclude conventional activities with the adolescents, like football tournaments for boys, joint James-Bond film evenings or dancing clubs for girls. This concern needs to be dealt with in order to avoid the false impression that gender-sensitivity just complicates and limits work with adolescents, which can be challenging enough anyway. This would make the adoption of gender-sensitive youth work very unattractive. Therefore, it is important to make sure in training on the topic that participants understand that gender-sensitive youth work does not make their working lives more difficult, but enriches it with greater choice for them, as well as their clients. Therefore, conventional approaches are not forbidden, but they should be reflected upon and complemented by various other kinds of activities and methods. James Bond has his place on the DVD shelf next to Elliot Billy, and after the skateboarding course there might be a workshop offered on Shiatsu for boys to relax from the sport. It is this diversity that makes gender-sensitive youth work what it is, and

this needs to be conveyed to the youth workers in order to make this approach more attractive and beneficial to them.

One strength of this thesis project is its combination of a theoretical as well as practical approach to the topic of gender-sensitive youth work with males. This makes the results concrete and applicable. Two main products, the workshop and the handbook, with additional material were designed and tested. These can serve as a starting point for all social institutions which deal with male adolescents and wish to improve their working practices by moving towards greater gender sensitivity. The fact that there has been only little material developed in this area with a specific focus on boys makes these products even more valuable.

To be added to this project would be information about how R3 implemented the gained knowledge from the workshop and handbook in their client work. Follow-up interviews or questionnaires would have been useful in assessing the actual impact of the workshop on the professional development and working practices of the youth workers. It would have also been interesting to know which methods worked for R3, and which did not – and for what reasons. Due to time constraints, this information was not yet available at the time of finishing the project.

As a further point, this thesis project does not offer broad enough data to assess to a more general degree the awareness, knowledge and perceived training of staff in Finnish youth facilities regarding gender-sensitive working practices with boys. Too few people were present in the workshop to permit generalization. It would be interesting to gain a broader insight by implementing a larger scale research project in future. The data resulting from such a study might be a useful starting point for a campaign advocating more awareness for gender-sensitivity in youth work.

When developing the topic further, it would be important to develop a more comprehensive workshop series – gender and gender-sensitive working approaches in youth work are such wide topics that they would require further examination. Besides, the concept of gender is so deeply rooted in our minds that it takes time to overcome old assumptions, and to develop new and more reflected strategies to deal with the issue. This project offers only a starting point on which to go further.

9   Conclusion

Recent research studies on the life of Finnish boys make it evident that concrete measurements and new approaches in youth work with males are required. Notwithstanding, there seems to be only little awareness on this necessity in current youth work – which is reflected in the limited literature and training available on the issue. Finnish gender policy mirrors this situation: although there are several institutions and entities responsible for gender equality, their focus is mostly on the empowerment of girls and women. This may be since our current image of boys and men as the strong gender does not permit seeing and accepting their neediness and vulnerability.

That gender-sensitive youth work targeted towards boys is still a strange phenomenon is also indicated in the little interest shown by most youth facilities when asked to collaborate in the project. This emphasizes the importance of the research objective of this thesis to raise awareness for the need of gender-sensitivity in youth work with male adolescents.

The collaboration with the eventual working life partner R3 also showed how little, if any, training and reflection on the topic had been received even by those youth workers who work on a daily basis with male adolescents. However, it was also demonstrated that it is possible to take initial steps towards improvement by implementing a few measures in just a small space of time: After a half-day workshop supplemented by a handbook, all participating youth workers felt that they had gained better knowledge and more awareness on the subject matter, and regarded the information provided as useful for their work.

Furthermore, this thesis project demonstrated that the ideas of social constructivism can support the design of training for professionals which aims to raise awareness. Two key approaches are essential here: reflection on internalized assumptions, and the provision of new knowledge in order to re-evaluate and challenge them. This way, it is possible to develop new and fresh approaches and views on social concepts which can make them more flexible and diverse.

In gender-sensitive youth work, this reflection and influx of new information has the aim of offering male adolescents more flexible and diverse ways of self-fulfillment and

individual life planning – also outside the traditional gender norm. R3 has already developed various new ideas to make their work with male adolescents more multifaceted and colorful. Other institutions need to follow. But, a wider movement in this direction will also require increased political intervention and strong advocacy work.

"Let´s free women like men from the constraints of gender, and let´s give them the same rights and duties, as well as same chances on real terms – and we will see what comes of this. … It won´t be the usual "women and men" – they no longer exist anyway – but it will be a new human. A human whose individual differences will be greater than the difference of gender. A human who will no longer accept being reduced to just one half, but who will grasp the other part stolen from him. A human who is neither just "female" nor "male", but complete. I am convinced that this, ultimately, would be a big relief for men and women."

Alice Schwarzer

(in Schwarzer 2007, p. 168; translated into English by the author)

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Schedule of the workshop on 1st June 2016 at R3

Session 1	Opening
Content	- Introductions of the participants - Introducing the workshop as a part of the thesis project (objectives, reasons, publication, etc.) - Presenting the targeted time schedule of the workshop (start, break, ending) - Brief overview on the content to be expected - Round: expectations, questions in advance, motivations and pre-knowledge of the participants
Objectives	- Create common understanding about what is planned, receive feedback on this in order to adjust accordingly as far as possible - create a comfortable atmosphere as the basis for the collaboration in the workshop - Get into the subject matter
Methods used	Discussion, PowerPoint Presentation, round of talks
Estimated duration	15 min

Session 2	Gender, Sex and Social Constructivism
Content	- Differences Sex – Gender; Doing Gender - Introduction of Theory of Social Constructivism - Gender as a social construct - Introduction of the concept of sexual dualism and the heterosexual matrix
Objectives	- Raise awareness for the difference gender- sex - Create understanding for gender as a social construct which is not set by nature and therefore changeable - Ponder on ways how gender roles are created & why they are still persistent - Draw attention to the restraints due to gender because of gender role expectations by society
Methods / material used	Discussion, PowerPoint Presentation, round of talks
Estimated duration	30 min.

Session 3	Masculinity and Male Gender Roles
Content	- Definition of masculinity - Personal reflection "How should a real boy / man be / not be?" (reflective exercise, filling a prepared form, basis for group work "Creating poster of masculinity – collecting male stereotypes")
Objectives	- Foster understanding for the societal expectations which boys and men should fulfil - Becoming aware on our individual perceptions and expectations towards boys and men - Understanding masculinity as a counterpart to femininity which results in avoidance of typically female character traits & behaviours
Methods & material	Individual reflection, group work, round of talks, discussion, PowerPoint Presentation
Estimated duration	40 min.

BREAK   (15 minutes, refreshments available)

Session 4	Gender and Male Adolescents
Content	- Adolescence as phase of constructing one´s adult self (and therefore one´s gender identity as a man) - Conflicting expectations of society & lack of positive male role models - Possible effects of gender roles on boys and young men - Male gender roles in modern media (film, advertisement, etc.) - Reality Check: Presentation of the Finnish School Health Promotion Study on the well-being of 8th and 9th Graders (comparison boys – girls, Finnish boys – 1st and 2nd generation immigrant boys)
Objectives	- Raising awareness for the challenges that male adolescents face while trying to form their gender identity as an older boy / man - Understand what serious and far-reaching impact gender roles can have on boys - Creating awareness for the impact of media on boys related to gender - Becoming aware of the current situation of male adolescents in Finland, pondering on the correlation between the data of the introduced study and effects of male gender roles - Becoming aware of the urgent need to focus in youth work on specific needs of boys (instead of only empowering girls)
Methods & material	PowerPoint Presentation, Presentation of example material related to gender in media as starting point for further discussion (DVDs, books, advertisement, etc.), round of talks, discussion and analysis on the results of the introduced study on male adolescents in Finland
Estimated duration	30 min.

Session 5	Gender-Sensitive Youth Work for Boys and Young Men
Content	- Definition of gender-sensitive youth work - Objectives of gender-sensitive youth work - Importance of self-reflection of the youth worker - Hand-on methods and tips on gender-sensitive youth work with boys - Misunderstandings regarding gender-sensitive youth work - Special focus on the work with immigrant boys
Objectives	- Getting a first impression about what gender-sensitivity in youth work means - Becoming aware of the importance of self-reflection on gender, as well as reflection in the team - Fostering and opening up ideas, thoughts and motivation to apply a more gender-sensitive approach in the work with male service users at R3 - Becoming aware that gender-sensitive youth work does not mean to take away options, but to offer new ones instead! - Considering the specific needs of R3 by applying gender-sensitive youth work to the work with immigrant boys
Methods / material	Discussion, PowerPoint Presentation,
Estimated duration	40 min.

Session 6	Closing
Content	- Space for the participants to express questions, thoughts and feelings - Final round: Feedback and "lessons learnt" - Introducing feedback form & self-reflection forms - Thanking for the participation
Objectives	- Dealing with open questions - Offering space for final thought, expressions of emotions and feelings, doubts, inner conflicts, etc. - Receiving feedback of the participants on the workshop (in speaking & writing) - Encouraging for self-reflection on gender (e.g. by using the provided self-reflection forms) and for further research on the subject matter of the workshop - Closing the event
Methods / material	Round of talks, PowerPoint, Feedback forms, Self-reflection forms
Estimated duration	15 min.

Feedback Form

on the Workshop "Gender-sensitive Youth Work with Boys and Young Men", 01.06.2016 at R3

> I am very interested in what you thought of the workshop, therefore I greatly appreciate your feedback! It would be great if you can take a few minutes to answer the following questions. The feedback is given anonymously.

1. Have you thought about the need of gender-sensitive youth work regarding boys and young men before you heard of this workshop?

    YES   NO

2. Have you perceived any training or further education on gender-sensitive youth work regarding boys and young men before this workshop? If so, where and to what extent?

    ----

3. As how important do you rate the topic of this workshop for your work?

Not important	somewhat important	important	very important

    Why?

    ----

4. Did you gain a better knowledge and more awareness on the issue of gender-sensitive youth work with boys and young men during the workshop?

    Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Agree

5. Do you think this workshop can help you in your work?

    YES   NO   MAYBE

6. What part of the workshop or what information did you find the most helpful or interesting? Why?

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7. Do you regard the material that you have received during the workshop as useful?

       Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Agree

8. Do you think that there was the right balance between discussion, group work and presentation during the workshop?

       Disagree   1   2   3   4   5   Agree

9. Do you have any ideas how the workshop could be improved?

What did you like the most about the workshop?

Thank you for your participation and for your feedback!! ☺

Feedback Form - INCLUDING ALL ANSWERS GAINED FROM THE PARTICIPANTS

on the Workshop "Gender-sensitive Youth Work with Boys and Young Men", 01.06.2016 at R3

> I am very interested in what you thought of the workshop, therefore I greatly appreciate your feedback! It would be great if you can take a few minutes to answer the following questions. The feedback is given anonymously.

1. Have you thought about the need of gender-sensitive youth work regarding boys and young men before you heard of this workshop?

   YES IIII   NO

2. Have you perceived any training or further education on gender-sensitive youth work regarding boys and young men before this workshop? If so, where and to what extent?

   - Gender studies at the university in Finland, professional training on gender-based violence in the U.K. (touched upon male behaviour)
   - No
   - When doing my sosionomi studies, we had some basic theory about it, but I would say that we spoke more about girls and young women.
   - I haven´t yet. I am currently studying in the social work field, so perhaps in near future I will.

3. As how important do you rate the topic of this workshop for your work?

Not important	somewhat important	important	very important IIII

   Why?

   - Our main target group are young men. We have not this far stopped to reflect upon the working methods we have in this group.
   - It is the central issue in this work.
   - Because I work mostly with young men daily.
   - Because as a volunteer & future social work field professional, I am sure I will encounter this topic an many occasions.

4. Did you gain a better knowledge and more awareness on the issue of gender-sensitive youth work with boys and young men during the workshop?

   Disagree   1   2   3   4 I   5 III   Agree

5. Do you think this workshop can help you in your work?

   YES   IIII   NO   MAYBE

6. What part of the workshop or what information did you find the most helpful or interesting? Why?

- Having a gender-specific approach does not mean taking anything away from an individual, but adding on new options.
- The combination of the theoretical framework, statistics and practical examples and ideas for implementing the work.
- Well all really. Mostly that we can really try to do different activities with the young men. Some might really enjoy doing new stuff. As a worker, I should think more widely…
- I found the entire workshop interesting, as well as the discussions we had with you & the other participants.

7. Do you regard the material that you have received during the workshop as useful?

Disagree   1   2   3   4 I   5 III   Agree

8. Do you think that there was the right balance between discussion, group work and presentation during the workshop?

Disagree   1   2   3   4   5 IIII   Agree

9. Do you have any ideas how the workshop could be improved?

- There could be more examples and discussions of alternative roles models, masculinity, etc.
- -
- It was great! Thank you!
- It was very well done. Perhaps the only minor improvement could be more time since the discussion seemed very interesting and an insightful complement to the presentation.

What did you like the most about the workshop?

- The interactive and reflective approach to the topic!
- The combination of the theoretical framework, statistics and practical examples and ideas for implementing the work. Besides, the good open discussions.
- Relaxed atmosphere and great topics on the slides. Professionally done PowerPoint and workshop.
- You prepared the material in a good and logical way, had a pleasant and relaxed speaking voice, and offered ample opportunity for discussion. Very well done!

Thank you for your participation and for your feedback!! 😊

Self-reflection form 1 – Which messages regarding gender roles have I received during my childhood / youth?

➔ *These questions are <u>not meant to be all answered,</u> they are only suggestions aimed to support your thinking and pondering on possible influences for your perception of gender.*

➔ *Perceptions on social constructions like gender are formed mostly already at a very young age, and then internalized. At a later stage in life, we often don´t think about those concepts anymore, but take them for granted, act accordingly and may even pass them on without awareness or reflection in our social interaction.*

➔ *Pondering on the following questions can help to be more aware of your perception and views regrading gender and where those may come from. Like this, you are able to act more consciously in situations where gender is an issue. Be aware of your own limitations and answer only to those questions which you feel up to.*

❖ When did you perceive yourself as a girl or boy, trans or inter for the first time?

❖ In what situations did you perceive yourself particularly as a girl, boy, trans or inter? Were you some-times perceived differently than you saw yourself? How did you react?

❖ Were you ever told that you are "a real girl / boy " (or optionally a princess, rascal, lady, gentleman, etc.)? Were you once described as particularly girlish / boyish"? In which situations and by whom? How did it feel and how did you respond to it?

❖ Were you once told, that you weren´t like "a real girl" / "a real boy"?

❖ What kind of clothing were you supposed to wear, what toys to play with and what behavior to show or to suppress?

❖ Was it somehow (more or less subtly) made clear to you that certain behaviors / toys / clothes are not appropriate for your gender?

❖ What were you rewarded for?

❖ How were intense feelings of you for girls or boys commented on?

❖ Which toys did you play the most with? What toys did you get and by whom? Did you have to fight for some or were some denied of you?

❖ How did you spend your free time?

❖ What kind of friendships / friends circles did you have? What did you do together? How were conflicts dealt with? Did you talk about feelings, sadness, shame, failing or anger?

❖ With what kind of adults around you did you grew up? How did they treat each other and how did they distribute roles and responsibilities? Who comforted? Who set limits? Who was responsible for bread-winning / house work / finances / leisure time? Who showed his / her interests and needs clearly and got through with it? Who enjoyed doing what and who relaxed with what kind of activity? To whom did you have the best relationship to?

❖ Did you have any role models? Who were they and what did they do? Did they have the same sex or sexual orientation as you?

❖ What relationship to your body was conveyed to you by young people and adults of the same and opposite sex? How did young people and adults in your environment of the same and other sex speak about their own bodies and about those of others? What kind of relationship did you develop yourself to your body? (E.g.: Performance, beauty, pleasure, well-being, testing limits, self-criticism, ...)

❖ Which feelings were you encouraged to show? For what were you criticized, for what praised? What ways of dealing with emotions and feelings have you developed?

❖ How did your social environment deal with handling strength and weakness, superiority and power-lessness?

❖ Which media (books, movies, songs, computer games, etc.) were particularly important to you? Which figures with what sexes were in it, and how they were presented? Were there any characters with whom you identified the most? Where there role models that you admired or had romantic feelings for? Were there some that you hated or despised? Why? Did gender play a role?

❖ How was femininity / masculinity or being a man / woman seen in your social environment? What was regarded as feminine / masculine or typical for women or men?

❖ How was femininity or masculinity rated in your environment? Was it spoken of in an appreciating / critical / derogatory / derisively / admiring manner? Were stereotypes created (e.g women & shopping

/ shoes / giggle / cooking/ care, and men & performance / football / violence / assertiveness)? Were there differences between persons (parents, peer group, teachers,) and situation? How did you feel about it?

❖ Did people around you speak critically / politically about gender relations? Were topics like feminism, criticism of sexism or heteronormativity, men´s rights and discrimination of boys dealt with support, or examined critically?
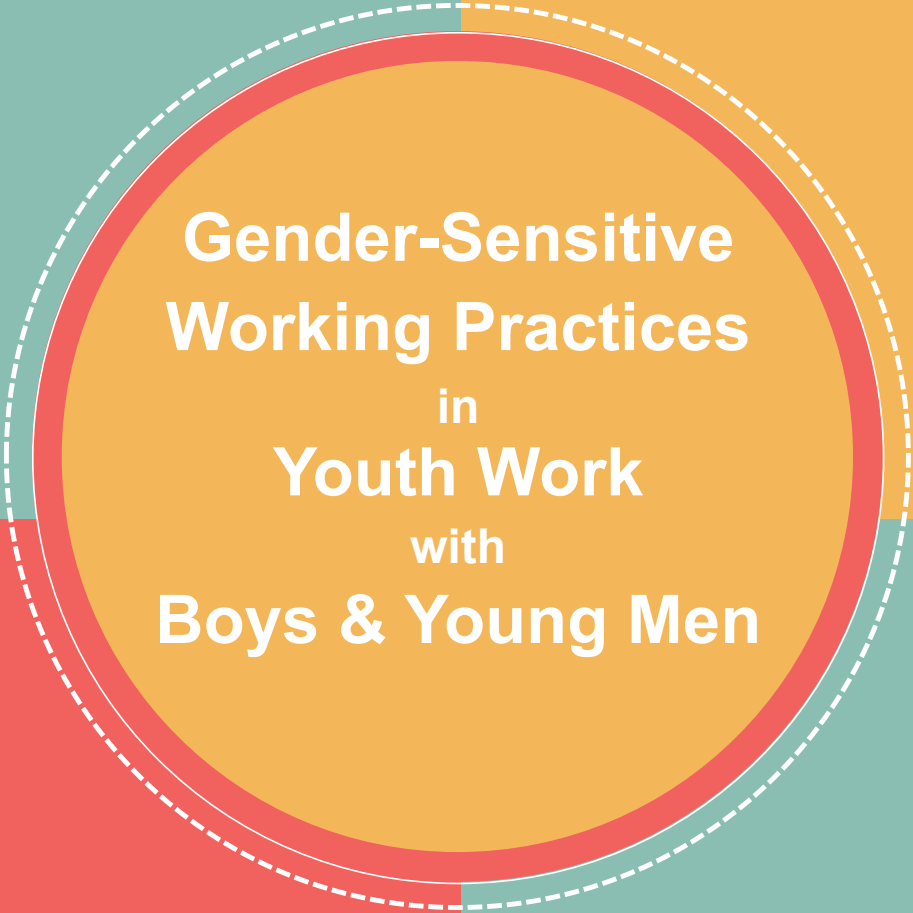
(Developed in German language by Katharina Debus, Dissens - Institut für Bildung und Forschung e.V.; translated into English and adapted by Verena Netzer; used as part of the Workshop on gender-sensitive youth work on the 1. June 2016 at R3 in Vantaa, with the kind approval of Katharina Debus)

Self-Reflection Form 2 - Questions supporting the reflection on the meaning of one's own sex and socialization for the pedagogical working practices with clients

➔ *For all questions can be considered in addition: What resources can I draw from my experiences for my pedagogical work? For whom am I particularly attentive or sensitive? Whose resources and / or problems do I perceive easily? With whom I can I get into contact particularly well? Against what dynamics can I distance myself particularly well?*

➔ *All questions are related to the clients. Not all questions need to be answered, but just those that seem interesting at the moment. The questions are not to find out what we do wrong or right, but to be aware of how gender and gender roles may influence our behavior and interaction with the clients. Gendered behavior is not always wrong: In the work with some clients it can be an important resource, others may not care about it, some may get upset or offended by it. Therefore, reflecting on gender is important to take professional responsibility for actions by means of (self-) observation and curiosity, and not in order to find perfect solutions!*

- By whom do I want to be liked, who scares me, about whom am I worried?

- Who stresses me most and how do I react to it? Do I try with some to please in order to avoid stress?

- Was I myself once an outsider? If so:
    - Am I therefore particularly solidary with marginalized boys or girls in my group?
    - Do I subsequently try to obtain the recognition of those who had refused it to me earlier?
    - Am I scared of the rebellion of the "strong" boys or girls?

- Did I often gain advantages from being a boy in childhood / youth, and do I therefore maybe care too little if a male client takes advantages of the dynamics of masculinity?

- Did I often gain advantages from being a girl in childhood / youth, and do I therefore maybe care too little if a female client takes advantages of the dynamics of femininity?

- Have I maybe failed as a boy or girl due to dynamics of masculinity? If so:

    - Do I therefore admire nowadays the corresponding masculinity practices with boys?
    - Do I reject these practices in a way so that I am not able to perceive the needs and troubles of the boys anymore?

- Have I maybe failed as a boy or girl due to dynamics of femininity? If so:

    - Do I therefore admire nowadays the corresponding femininity practices with boys?
    - Do I reject these practices in a way so that I am not able to perceive the needs and troubles of the girls anymore?

- Do I prefer those kind of boys / men which I had admired or desired in childhood / youth? Or am I particularly critical towards them in order to escape their charm?

- Do I prefer those kind of girls / women which I had admired or desired in childhood / youth? Or am I particularly critical towards them in order to escape their charm?

- How do I get in contact? How do I express affection? How do I make offers to help someone? Is there a gendered level? (For example, asking about how someone is, pat on the shoulder, hug someone, maintain distance, jostling, joking, talking about books, movies, music – which ones?, listen behind every word for hints of trouble or problems, ask intensively, ignore hints on problems rather,…)

- To what ways of getting into contact of clients do I react relaxed? Which make me feel like supporting the person? Which make me feel uncomfortable? When do I feel that someone has come too close? When do I feel inner resistance towards someone? Is this to do with the sex or gender of a person?

- How do I try to create fun during my pedagogical work with the clients? How is this related with my own experiences and gender stereotypes?

  - Do I use (independently of my own sex) traditional male ways of creating a good atmosphere, like competition, slogans or sayings or sexualization?
  - How can I manage to have different ways of having fun equally next to each other?
  - Which ways are fun without excluding others for instance through a lack of quick-wittedness?
  - How is it possible, to create hereby an atmosphere in which someone can address discrimination or violation without being marginalized or accused for destroying the good mood?

- What do I regard as a good mood?
  - How do I rate competing within the client group or exclusions single group members? What do I think if some participants care only for themselves or their closest friends?

  - Do I expect (regardless of my own sex) traditionally female harmony-behavior including the self-less effort of thinking and caring always also for all others?

  - Do I expect this especially of girls?

  - Or do I regard traditionally male competitive behavior and trying to compete in who has the coolest sayings as "normal"? In this case, am I aware of the inflicted injuries?

  - How can I create an atmosphere, in which on the one hand, all are safe and at ease but also all can do what they feel like and take care of themselves?

- According to what criteria do I select texts or films?
  - Do I prefer media that I like nowadays or those that I would have preferred as a teenager?
  - Do I prefer media that correspond to male or female gender norms?
  - Do I oppose media that correspond to male or female gender norms?
  - Do I communicate critic regarding certain types of media towards the adolescents in constructive manner?
  - Do I suggest that certain media forms which contain representations of "real" women / girls or "real" boys should be not watched or disliked?

Handbook

Gender-Sensitive
Working Practices
in
Youth Work
with
Boys & Young Men

by Verena Netzer
2016

ON THIS HANDBOOK

For a long time, it was not regarded as necessary in youth work to pay particular attention to the situation and needs of male adolescents. While the focus had been put mostly on the empowerment of girls and young women, boys as the "strong gender" did not seem to need any specific support or guidance (Hollstein & Matzner 2007, p. 9; Pollack 1998, p. 10.).

Latest national and international studies have reported an alarming increase in problematic behaviours amongst male adolescents like worsening school performances, a high amount of substance abuse, aggressive conduct, as well as emotional isolation and high suicide rates. One explanation for these phenomena could be the impact of gender, a social construct which has still a powerful influence on our lives, and which creates different socialisation circumstances for girls and boys (Hertling 2008, p. 154). According to research (Hertling 2008, pp. 12-15), many boys suffer currently from a lack of orientation and conflicting societal expectations on how to build their (gender) identities as boys and men. Next to traditional expectations of masculinity requesting attributes like male toughness, strength, independence and unfeelingness, more advanced concepts of masculinity have emerged and demand additional soft skills like sensuality, empathy and sensitivity (Hertling 2008, p. 1; Pollack 1998, p. 26). These conflicting requests can lead to negative impacts on the development and behaviours of boys and young men like withdrawal, aggression, low self-esteem and compensating behaviours like drug or alcohol abuse.

Social institutions offering youth services are important instances where gender roles can be either strengthened or eliminated. Subsequently, it is particularly important for anyone working with adolescents to reflect on one´s perceptions of gender, to evaluate how these perceptions affect the client work and to gain up-to-date information and knowledge on gender and gender theories.

This handbook offers a brief overview of the concept of gender and masculinity, and provides practical suggestions on how to develop gender-sensitive working practices in the work with boys and young men.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 38% of Finnish boys state that they manage with life in general poorly or rather poorly (compared to 22% of girls) (Youth Barometer 2015, p. 1).

- 15.5% of male 8th and 9th graders in Finland use snuff occasionally (compared to 2.6% of girls) (Räsänen, Lintonen & Konu 2015, p. 7).

- Male 8th and 9th graders in Finland are 8 times more likely than girls to engage in gambling like playing at slot machines or doing sports bets, lotteries and casino games (Räsänen, Lintonen & Konu 2015, p. 7).

- 27 % of 15- 29-year-old Finnish boys smoke regularly (18% of girls) (Myllyniemi 2014, p. 39).

- According to the latest PISA studies, boys are amongst the 70 % of poorest performers in the Finnish test results (YLE 2015).

- In the years 2011 to 2013, twice as many Finnish boys than girls perceived additional educational support like intensified and special support in order to manage school (Finnish National Board of Education 2015).

- 12 % of Finnish boys (and 6% of girls) attending 8th and 9th grade reported to have no close friends to share personal issues with (Terveyden ja Hyvinvoin-nin Laitos 2015, p. 1).

- Social and emotional loneliness lasting for at least a year have been perceived by 17% of boys (and 10% of girls) attending 7th to 9th grade in Finland (Juntilla 2015 in Terveyden ja Hyvinvoinnin Laitos 2015, p. 1).

- Three out of four suicides among adolescents in Finland are committed by boys (YLE 2014).

- Finnish boys are more often victims of violence than girls. Every 3rd boy (and every 5th girl) has experienced threats of violence, while every 4th boy (and about every 6th girl) has also become a victim of physical violence. (Oikeuspoliittinen Tutkimuslaitos cited in Finnish Youth Co-operation Allianssi 2010, p. 36.)

The neglected difference: sex or gender?

When speaking of someone being a boy or girl, a man or woman, we are often not aware that this issue can relate to two very different concepts: sex and gender. In order to understand the influence of gender on our lives, it is important to be aware what these terms actually refer to.

Sex is related to our anatomy, hormones, and physiology – for instance to our genitals or physical stature (West & Zimmerman 1987, p. 125). Due to these physical features, it is mostly clear from birth whether someone is male or female. Still, there are many exceptions of ambiguous and incompatible physical criteria which do not allow an easy categorization as male or female. These exceptions can be different physical morphologies or chromosome configurations. (West & Zimmerman 1987, pp. 125-126.)

Gender refers to a person´s femininity or masculinity (Edgar & Sedgwick 2008, p. 139). While sex is a relatively fixed "matter of biology", gender is a "matter of culture" (Edgar & Sedgwick 2008, p. 139). Gender is constructed through psychological, cultural and social means, and consists of learned patterns of behaviors which are created in interactions with others. (West & Zimmerman 1987, pp. 125-126.) For the most part, our understanding of gender is shaped by the main culture in which we grow up, and by the point in history in which we live. Therefore, gender is changeable over time and varies geographically. This can be easily understood when considering how men in different countries, like for instance in Kenia, Afghanistan or Finland, express their masculinity. Even within our culture, there have been great differences in history regarding how we behave as men or women, and how we express our gender identities.

Just at very young age, we learn how we are expected to behave in order to match our gender. (Hertling 2008, p. 154.) Behaviours of girls and boys are often judged on differently: What is accepted or even desirable for a girl (like being emotional, caring for one´s outlook, being sweet and humble, etc.), may not be tolerated for a boy (who is expected or at least accepted to be wild, cheeky, aggressive, etc.). This applies of course also the other way. Therefore, boys and girls develop differently during their socialisation processes.

> Sex is about *being male* or *female;* gender is about *behaving masculine* or *feminine*. While sex is natural, gender is constructed in social interaction in our society and changes its appearance over time and in different (sub-)cultures.

Masculinity - about the "right" performance as a boy or man

Different genders in our society face different societal expectations regarding their ways of acting, behaving, appearing and living their lives. Masculinity means here the social and cultural expectations towards boys and men. This relates for instance to their specific way of thinking and behaving, their specific desires and their outlooks. (Burr 1998, p. 12.) In Western society, the stereotypical man is expected to think in a logical and rational way, to be in control of his emotions, to have a sexual desire for women and a love for football, ice hockey and fast cars.

Masculinity is regarded as the opposite way of stereotypical behaviours of girls and women (Titley 2003, p. 11). Therefore, many boys and men try to overcome all innate female character traits in order to be more "manly" (Hertling 2008, p. 71). Typical "woman behaviour" is excluded from the 'set' of desired masculine behaviours and character traits, like caring for close social relationships, expressing one´s emotional life, being emphatic, relying on intuition and admitting vulnerability (Sielert 2002, p. 48.) Instead, important values of masculinity are traits like rationality, proactivity, clarity, control over oneself and others (including one´s emotions), as well as independency and a fighting spirit (Sielert 2002, p. 48). These ideals are mirrored in the outer appearance of the 'perfect' teenage boy or man: He should be mascular and express his masculinity openly in his gestures, with only a few emotions like aggression or anger being expressed (Titley 2003, p. 10). The concept of masculinity is closer to an idealist version of boys and men than to any real male human being, therefore it is mostly not reachable. (Paechter 2007, p. 12.) Still, we are reminded of this "ideal" masculinity very regularly in everyday life - especially in advertisements, films and other media - so that it is sometimes easy to forget that we are dealing with nothing else than an idealized version of our collective imagination.

> Masculinity refers to the idealistic ideas of what it means to be a boy or man in a certain society. It defines itself with a set of certain behaviours and features, as well as the opposite of what is regarded as feminine. In order to be accepted as a "real man", boys and man often feel consciously or unconsciously the societal pressure to follow these norms and to suppress desires, emotions or skills that go against those.

Teenage boys and the concept of gender

During adolescence, boys are particularly affected by identity conflicts and insecurities regarding their roles in society (Hollstein 2007, p. 44). This is not surprising since adolescence is the time in which boys build their potential male adult selves (Clarke-Stewart & Parke 2014, p. 301). Therefore, young people have a strong tendency to take on gender-typical patterns of behaviours (Clarke-Stewart & Parke 2014, p. 301). Girls often aim to be particularly feminine regarding their behaviours and outlook; boys perform the "proper" man with all the necessary toughness and coolness, and often an ample amount of machoism.

Gender roles can create a conflict between fulfilling one´s personal needs and the pressure to perform in a certain expected way (Titley 2003, p. 8). In adolescence, it becomes important to be regarded as mature and grown-up, and to be respected and acknowledged by peers and adults. (Over-) Performing masculinity seems to be for many boys a way to search recognition as a "full" man. (Stuve & Debus 2012, p. 35.) Adolescents often set up own rules on how to behave to gain respect within their cliques (Paechter 2007, p. 16).
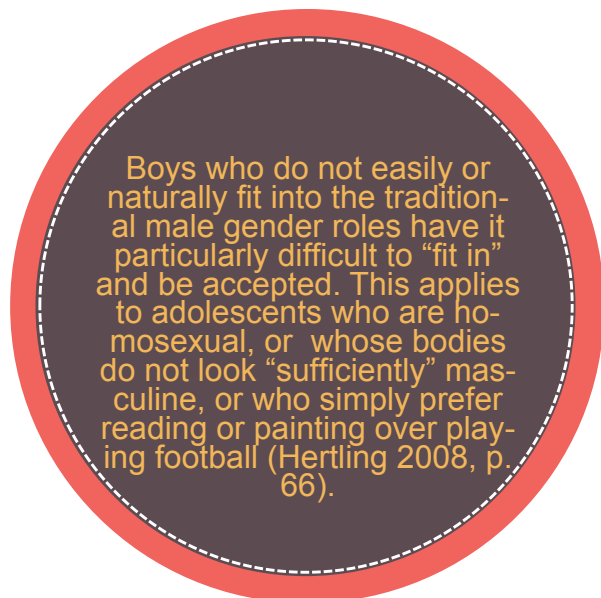
One big challenge of male adolescents in finding and building their identities is the lack of concrete and positive male role models in their close environment (Sielert 2002, p. 53). This is first of all due to the absence of fathers -since these are either mostly busy with their jobs, or after a divorce barely available to their children; additionally, the great majority of staff at social institutions like schools and youth centers are female (Beuster 2007, p. 11). This lack of male role models leaves the teenage

boys to search for guidance elsewhere: mostly in the idealised heroes presented through media. However, Rambo, Bond & Co do not offer applicable solutions to solving the everyday challenges of adolescence, nor do they provide individual support, personal acknowledgement or physical and emotional warmth (Hertling 2008, p. 20). This disorientation and the feeling of "not fitting in the role" may lead to compensations through alcohol or substance abuse, emotional withdrawal, or expressing one´s frustration or the need of gaining back control in some form of violence or other criminal activity (Hollstein 2007, p. 42).

Societal pressure to perform as a "proper" boy or man forces boys into one-dimensional life-choices: certain personality traits, interests or skills have to be suppressed (Hollstein 2007, p. 40), and a broad range of emotions like fear or sorrow need to be cast aside (Stuve & Debus 2012b, p. 36). Also future professions are often chosen more according to societal expectations than on one´s individual wishes or skills (Hertling 2008, p. 72).

In order to support adolescents in developing according to own wishes, needs and skills without restraints due to gender role expectations, a gender-sensitive pedagogy is required. The following chapters aim to introduce professionals the idea of gender-sensitivity in youth work and supply hands-on tips for its implementation.

Boys who do not easily or naturally fit into the traditional male gender roles have it particularly difficult to "fit in" and be accepted. This applies to adolescents who are homosexual, or whose bodies do not look "sufficiently" masculine, or who simply prefer reading or painting over playing football (Hertling 2008, p. 66).

8

3 GENDER-SENSITIVE YOUTH WORK – WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

Gender-sensitive youth work opposes restraining gender roles and offers adolescents instead a wide variety of options, experiences and ideas to try out and to choose from. Working gender-sensitively means to be aware of existing gender stereotypes and roles, and to have theoretical knowledge about their creation and impacts on individuals in our society. Institutional structures and educational practices are evaluated critically to assure gender equality. This means for instance to consider what kind of activities are offered to male, female, transgender and other service users. One-sided and gendered working practices are challenged. (Walter 2005, p. 54.) As an example, male service users should not have only the option to choose from different sports or activities with much action, while girls have only the choice between cooking evenings or handicraft clubs. Instead, the pedagogical focus is directed towards the individual adolescent and his or her specific life situation. Instead of assuming that all boys and all girls have same interests, services and activities are provided according to the individual needs and interest of each adolescent – irrespectively of their gender (Sielert 2002, p. 88; Walter 2005, p. 54).

4

The Main Objectives of Gender-Sensitive Youth Work are…

….to foster individual diversity. This diversity allows that identities and social interactions can develop without restraints due to gender norms or other stereotypings (Debus 2012, p. 150). Therefore, especially 'unusual' behaviours are supported which are not in line with the repertoire of stereotypical men or women behaviours and which open alternative ways of being and doing things (Stuve & Debus 2012, p. 38).

….to eliminate structural inequalities in institutions providing youth services. The aim is to assure equal access to pay, physical integrity, sexual self-determination and to personal and societal acknowledgment to everyone. (Debus 2012, p. 150.)

…to raise awareness for gender inequalities and their manifestations. Besides, ways and methods are searched for which eliminate gender inequalities and invite to reflect on existing gender prejudices and societal expectations of performance (Hertling 2008, pp. 155-156).

5 PRACTICAL APPROACHES IN GENDER-SENSITIVE YOUTH WORK

Since gender-sensitive pedagogy emphasises the importance of an individualistic, client-centred approach, it does not comprise of generalized tools or standardised methods regarding its implementation. Instead, a successful implementation of the gender-sensitive pedagogy is built on the individual relationship between the professional and the clients, on the personality of the professional, and of course on the individual life situations and characteristics of the services users (Bentheim, May, Sturzenhecker & Winter 2004, p. 117). Still, there are some working practices that have been applied successfully in youth work with boys and young men. The most common ones are introduced here to be selected and applied according to the specific requirements of each youth institution and their clientele.

High degree of self-reflection of the professional

When working with adolescents, professionals are always examples and role models in how they deal with their own gender identities and with gender in general (e.g. how they behave towards members of the other gender, what kind of clothing style they choose, what tasks are they responsible for, etc.). Only by reflecting on one´s own behaviours and perceptions related to gender can prevent that traditional gender roles are unintentionally supported or emphasised when interacting with service users (Sielert 2002, p. 97; Bentheim 2007, p. 264). This requires for instance to understand how one´s own gender identity has been constructed over the course of one´s life. The perception of oneself as a man, women, transgender and so on has a great impact on how we deal with others (Hertling 2008, p. 169). Besides, it is only possible to be aware and open to see and understand how others deal with this subject, when having dealt with the topic before; otherwise, own ideas, inner conflicts and wishes may be projected onto others (Bentheim, May, Sturzenhecker & Winter 2004, p. 125). Another reason for the importance of reflection is to avoid assessing or valuing service users in relation to their gender. Implying certain behaviors, skills or interests onto service users bears the risk of stigmatizing the adolescents according to

their gender. This could dismiss their real individual needs, desires and wishes. (Hertling 2008, p. 149.)

Reflecting on gender, one´s gender identity and perception can be done individually, as well as in a group setting. Related literature can support this process (Sielert 2002, p. 102). Possible questions to reflect on can be found in the two reflection forms that are attached as supplement sheets to this handbook.

> " Even small phrases can unintentionally support traditional gender roles and lead to generalisations that ignore the individuality of service users: "Wow, you have become a real boy / man!", "The boys haven´t tidied up again!", "Boys always need a lot of exercise and action.", "Boys sometimes need to tussle a bit, they don´t mean is seriously.", "Boys are just different", "The most problems in my work I have with the boys", etc.

Homosocial versus coeducational working context

Gender-sensitive youth work chooses carefully between the options of working with a group of exclusively boys or girls (*homosocial*), or with a mixed group (*co-educational*). Both ways of working have own advantages in certain situations and for specific objectives.

A homosocial group setting allows to work with adolescents on intimate topics which might be difficult to express or deal with openly in the presence of the other sex. With boys, this could be subjects related to sexual performance, dealing with fear or insecurity, school problems, experiences of violence, fatherhood, conflict management, unemployment or masculinity. (Bentheim, May, Sturzenhecker & Winter 2004, p. 118; Debus 2012, p. 152; Hertling 2008, p. 170.) The presence of girls pressures some boys to perform more masculinity which hinders emotional openness and admitting of vulnerability and fears. When working in homosocial context, it can help boys to open up when realizing that others struggle with similar challenges. Experiencing mutual exchange and support can be a very pleasant and easing experience. (Sielert 2007, pp. 59-60.) Besides, working in homosocial context helps the professional to become aware of individual differences and needs within the group of

boys. This allows a more personal approach later on. (Bentheim, May, Sturzenhecker & Winter 2004, p. 118.) The work in homosocial context creates for boys also a safe space to try out things that they might not have been exposed to before due to their socialization as males (Sielert 2002, p. 92). New experiences like cooking evenings, yoga exercises or painting sessions could bring up skills and interests that might have never been explored otherwise.

Homosocial group constellations also bear certain risks: By dividing boys and girls into two groups, the adolescents are forced to side with one gender category. This way, the concept of gender is emphasised once more, which might support stereotypical gender behaviours and gendered specialisation of interests. (Hertling 2008, pp. 76-79.) Therefore, it is always necessary to justify why, when and how a homosocial group setting is the best solution, and why, when and how a coeducational setting should be chosen. (Bentheim, May, Sturzenhecker & Winter 2004, p. 118.) In addition, it needs to be considered that also adolescents within homo-social groups have very different needs and interests. These might be neglected when assuming that a certain topic affects or interests *all* boys. It could be for instance uncomfortable for homosexual boys to discuss sexuality in a group of mostly heterosexual boys (Debus 2012, p. 153).

In contrast, working in coeducational group settings can weaken the differences created through the different socialisations of boys and girls, and can lead to an increased mutual understanding of the other gender. This can be a starting point for more conflict-free relations between the genders. (Jantz & Brandes 2006, pp. 59-61.)

Homosocial as well as coeducational group settings have their limitations and risks, and might exclude some adolescents. Therefore, it has to be always evaluated what method is best applied in what situation, and what benefits and risks they may entail. The most effective implementation of gender-sensitive youth work consists out of a combination of different settings (Jantz & Brandes 2006, p. 15).

Boys groups can support the creation of homosocial friendships. Boys can experience that friendship is more important than competition and rivalry (Bentheim 2007, p. 265).

Creative pedagogical approaches

It has been experienced in youth work that especially some male teenagers are not willing or interested in engaging in activities that involve mostly talking. This might be since several boys are just not accustomed to in-depth-conversations, and feel therefore uncomfortable with the method; or they may just relate guided discussions to being educated by the adult facilitator. Therefore, a more creative and active approach is often useful.

One possibility is to pick up behaviours and topics of interests of adolescents and make those tangible in ways tangible (Bentheim, May, Sturzenhecker & Winter 2004, pp. 122-123). Although physicality, movement and creativity are important elements of successful youth work with boys, joint reflections and evaluations of activities are still necessary (Sielert 2007, p. 54). Otherwise, traditional male performance patterns and one-dimensionally typical male skills like building, playing football and repairing are supported without offering space for new learning experiences. As an example, after a weekend spent together at a cottage with outdoor activities, the group of boys and youth workers could ponder together on experienced emotions and how those were handled, on what was annoying, what worked, and what they would change next time.

It might require a lot of social skills, animation, serving as an example, directed actions and patience of the professional to reach the level of intimacy and trust where open discussions and joint reflections are possible. The beginning might seem artificial, take time and require a lot of preparation work. Often several exercises, role plays, games and dialogues with individuals are necessary beforehand. (Sielert 2002, p. 96.)

EXAMPLE

In a youth centre, a group of teenage boys repeatedly bragged after weekends about how much alcohol they had consumed again; the youth worker observes this for a while and picks the topic then up by suggesting to make the "drink performance" of the boys visible by building together a "beer tin tower" out of all emptied beer tins collected in one weekend. The boys agree, and after the next weekend, they bring the empty beer tins to the youth centre.

While building the tower, many beer stories come up. When the tower is finished, everyone is impressed by its height. The teenagers start to discuss more serious questions like how much liquid fits into a person, how much alcohol leads to a poisoning and what measures to take then.

Since there are so many open questions, the youth worker invites an assistant doctor to help the boys to find answers. The information is collected on posters and put up next to the beer tower. The comments of the boys regarding alcohol consumption become more critical and expand more and more to its real origin: the fear of talking to girls, having to prove one´s coolness, peer pressure etc. This way, the topic leads to open discussions like how to flirt, the role of boys in starting relationships and similar questions.

All these topics were not planned by the youth worker, but came from the adolescents themselves and revealed important issues to deal with in work with the young people.

(Bentheim, May, Sturzenhecker & Winter 2004, p.123.)

Violence prevention

A very common topic in the work with boys is the management of aggression and conflicts. Concerning adolescents, aggression is mostly regarded as a way of dealing with suppressed feelings like sorrow, vulnerability and fear. Due to societal pressures ("A real man does not cry, knows no pain, is always strong, etc. "), many boys feel that these emotions cannot be expressed otherwise (Hertling 2008, p. 42). Since boys are more often than girls confronted with violence (as perpetrator AND as victim, see Chapter 1), it is important to offer them space to get to know their aggressions in order to find ways in dealing with them in a controlled manner. Communication training, workshops involving role plays, theater or methodological dialogue can be useful methods for this. (Sielert 2007, p. 61.) Main aims are to foster the adolescents' abilities for empathy and understanding others. Also the abilities to set rules for oneself, accept boundaries of others, and act with responsibility for oneself and others should be fostered. (Sielert 2007, p. 61.) Besides, space and opportunities can be offered to experiment with different ways of calming down and relaxing, like meditation exercises, massages or methods to express oneself in creative ways (music, dance, painting, theatre, etc…). Also the experience of having a safe space in which one can talk freely about one´s fears and doubts without being ridiculed can open up new ways of dealing with conflicts and aggression.

Promoting a colorful diversity of different life perspectives and individual options

Gender-sensitive youth work aims to promote various kind of gender identities next to each other without combating some of them. Instead, diversity and modern alternative ways of being feminine and masculine are suggested (Stuve & Debus 2012, p. 38). This requires an atmosphere in which adolescents have access to many different options and are able to try out, experiment and gain new experiences without fearing to be degraded when behaving not according to traditional gender roles. This also presupposes openness and courage of the youth workers for unexpected outcomes and unconventional activities, as well as trust into the adolescents. The aim is to disburden the adolescents from having to behave like a "real" boy or girl. Practical ways to foster this diversi-

ty can be for instance to offer internships for boys in typical "women´s professions", like in social and educational fields. Positive rewards and outcomes encourage the adolescents to engage with these new experiences and activities. (Hertling 2008, p. 164.) Other possibilities are to arrange encounters with older, societally accepted boys or men who do something in their life outside the gender norms, like implementing civilian service or working in a kindergarten, or living an alternative sexual life like homosexuality. This way, the teenagers become aware of different choices in life and realize that one´s masculinity is not "lost" by doing something outside the masculine patterns. But also possible challenges when choosing these alternative paths should be discussed. (Hertling 2008, p. 164.) Besides, of course also youth workers with different ways of being or living can serve as examples (Stuve & Debus 2012, p. 38). Still, the wish for normality or integrity has to be accepted and not restricted (Stuve & Debus 2012, p. 38). Only when teenagers feel that they are accepted as they are, they feel free to engage also with new experiences. (Hertling 2008, p. 161).

While gendered behaviours of teenagers are accepted as long as they do not exclude or degrade others, particularly those activities and skills are supported and enhanced which are outside the gender norm. In the work with boys, this may be activities like doing handicraft, cooking, meditating, trying vegetarian food, deepening relationships, discussing emotions or expressing oneself with means of art (Sielert 2002, p. 95). Like this, boys can gain new experiences, skills and interests which might have been denied on the traditional paths of becoming a man.

Enhancing the adolescents to reflect critically on gender and gender roles

It is of course not enough that only professionals reflect on gender; also adolescents need to be encouraged to ponder critically about this subject. Gender-sensitive pedagogy supports young people in becoming more aware of gender stereotypes and their restrictive impacts. Adolescents are not only passively affected by gender when being socialised, but construct their gender identities partly actively. Becoming aware of one´s current role can support in taking over control and deciding consciously what norms to follow and where to choose alternative ways. In practice, this means to discuss with adolescents openly about what it

means to be a boy or man in our society. Specific movies or advertisements dealing with this topic can serve as an introduction (e.g. discussing the roles of men and women in action films, watching the movie "Billy Elliot", pondering on the representation of men and women in advertisements, comparing movie heroes to "normal" humans in our every day life etc.) .

What impacts have traditional gender norms on our lives? It is important that adolescents recognize possible costs and benefits. One useful method to achieve this in the work with boys can be the joint creation of posters or collages with typical male character traits. Subsequently, gains and losses of being a "real" man are put against each other (like "being cool", "not having to do so much housework" and "getting better pay at work" versus "not being allowed to show neediness", "not playing a big role in the education of one´s child", "being excluded from typical women´s jobs" etc.). How could alternative ways of masculinity look like?

Stereotypes mentioned by adolescents or others should be picked up and inspected together critically. Counter-examples can be searched for (e.g. girls or women who are great in repairing things and good in playing football, and boys or men who are wonderful cooks and very loving fathers)(Campbell & Storo 1996, p. 4). Also gendered leisure time activities are looked at critically: Are there also other things to do than only playing football or computer games? How would it feel to do something fully new and different?

Fostering the role of fathers

Fathers are in youth work often forgotten as important reference persons for their children and therefore valuable resources (Matzner 2007, p. 186). According to several studies, especially teenage boys benefit from close relationships to their fathers (Matzner 2007, p. 174). Fathers can serve as identification figures and positive male role models in dealing with emotions, conflicts and other challenges in everyday life (Hertling 2008, p. 129). Still, many adolescents do not have deeper relationships with their fathers (Beuster 2007, p. 42). One reason for this are the high divorce rates which cause that most children live with their mothers and do not have sufficient contact to their fathers (Hertling 2008, p. 129). Besides, the traditional role of the father is in many families still limited to the one of the breadwinner who is mostly at work and not much involved in educational issues (Hertling 2008, p. 131).

Therefore, it is one important objective of gender-sensitive youth work to challenge traditional patterns of masculinity also regarding the roles of fathers. New roles need to be defined which allow fathers more participation in their families. (Hertling 2008, p. 143.) It is essential to raise awareness for the importance and the positive impact of close father-child relationships on the development of their children. Fathers are not just important for economic support, but as humans. (Matzner 2007, p. 176.)

Youth workers can foster a positive relationship between fathers and sons in many ways: by organizing events like father-son-weekends, offering toddlers´ groups for fathers and their babies, or by implementing creative workshops for fathers and sons. Besides, evening workshops and information events specifically for fathers and about topics like the role of fathers in education, violent-free education, survival tips for single fathers and legal advice for divorced fathers can help to strengthen the roles of fathers (Sielert 2007, pp. 61-62). Furthermore, an open space needs to be created in which fathers can exchange experiences, advice, doubts and fears regarding education, fatherhood and their role in the family (Hertling 2008, p. 141).

Supporting awareness and responsibility for one´s own health, mental well-being and body

Caring for one´s own health and well-being is mostly not regarded as particularly masculine. Therefore, many boys are not very interested in experimenting with vegetarian food or yoga and mediation. Instead, male ideals present their trained muscular bodies and strong, controlled minds. They do not bother about possible physical or mental deficits like colds, alcohol poisonings, burn-outs or injuries gained through risky behaviours (Hertling 2008, p. 109).

Therefore, several boys have only very limited knowledge about health and their bodies in general. Gender-sensitive pedagogy aims to support boys in getting to know their physical and mental strengths and limitations (Bentheim 2007, p. 265). More awareness for one´s own health and well-being decreases risky behaviours related to drug and alcohol usage or sports. Pedagogical activities should support boys and young men to look and also to feel their own body instead of dealing just with the outside world. (Sielert 2007, p. 55.) This awareness can be achieved by means of manual work, moderate exercise, relaxation techniques, meditation, yoga and mutual massages. The adolescents also learn to gain better awareness of their emotions and develop ways to express these in words. Also a workshop on stress management, a Shiatsu-weekend or an internship in a hospital or elderly people´s home support boys in gaining new information about physical and mental health. (Sielert 2007, p. 62.) Being more aware of oneself and acting accordingly helps boys and young men to gain more control over their lives. Thereby, they develop more self-confidence. (Bentheim 2007, p. 265.) This way, it can become easier for teenage boys to accept and like themselves, even if they do not have the typical "dream boy´s body" or if they cannot always keep a clear head. This may also ease the pressure to compensate with extensive strength training and makes one take the front cover of the next issue of Men´s Health with a grain of salt.

Offering emotional safety, responding to fears and supporting adolescents in bearing inconsistencies

Life is not always straightforward, and inconsistencies are part of it. This also applies to our gender identities. Some character traits, needs or desires may not fit with the way we want to be or be seen. One boy may be ashamed of his homosexual desires; another one may keep the wish to become a poem writer a secret (since it is "uncool"). Some boys may be frustrated about their lacking technical or manual skills, despite these would be expected of males. Instead, one may have a keen interest in classical music or romantic novels and is deadly scared when watching a horror movie.

Adolescents need the support of adults in order to be able to accept and take on also those parts within them which might not fit the picture of the type of men they want to become. It is important to make adolescents understand that inconsistencies belong to our reality and also occur within one personality (Stuve & Debus 2012, p. 32). Maybe the youth worker is willing to share own experiences of inconsistencies in his or her personality (Stuve & Debus 2012, p. 32). Alternatively, a guest is invited from outside who can serve as a positive male role model by admitting own limitations and the impossibility of fulfilling all societal expectations, but having found satisfaction and competences in other areas (Hertling 2008, p. 164). It is important for young people to understand that one feels and behaves not always in a straightforward manner – and does not have to: one may behave in one situation like an adult, and in the next one like a child; one may feel strong on one day or in specific situations, and helpless and weak at other times. All these inner contradictions and discrepancies belong to us, they are normal and not a sign of immaturity. Often they can become even constructive if used in the right way. (Jantz & Brandes 2006, p. 113.)

Being aware of this can help boys to better accept and deal with their fears and insecurities; they learn that they will not lose their masculinity by feeling vulnerable, sad, emotional or tender (Bentheim, May, Sturzenhecker & Winter 2004, pp. 120-121). Youth workers can support also by taking up emotions like fear or insecurity, naming them and making them more bearable for the adolescent (Stuve & Debus 2012, p. 32).

Considering boys with immigration background

Masculinity is expressed differently in different cultures; therefore, it might be challenging for youth workers to find the right way of supporting boys with immigrant backgrounds in building their male (gender) identity. The performance of masculinity of immigrant boys is often connected to other matters: since immigrants often suffer from inequalities, racism and other barriers, they have it also more difficult to access education, employment and financial resources. Subsequently, they often identify and distinguish themselves with other values, like with a pronounced performance of masculinity. (Toprak 2007, pp. 218 & 224.) The marginalization within society often has a much greater impact on the behaviors of immigrants than their cultural background (Bentheim, May, Sturzenhecker & Winter 2004, p. 130). These complex relations require a lot of knowledge and understanding on part of the youth workers. Multicultural competences are not enough; a more comprehensive knowledge about each service user´s culture is required: the professionals need to find out about different concepts of masculinities and ways of socializing and educating in each culture (Toprak 2007, p. 225). The immigrant boys can be the best guides in explaining their cultures. It is also important to gain more information on racism and discrimination in order to understand their impacts on the life situations of adolescents and their families. The main focus should be on the current individual situation and correlated challenges of each adolescent rather than only on his ethnicity. (Bentheim, May, Sturzenhecker & Winter 2004, pp. 130 -131.)

Different service users with different perceptions of masculinities can be a valuable resource for group discussions about different ways of being a man. Open discussions can foster intercultural communication and understanding. (Hertling 2008, pp. 167-168.) Ideas about alternative ways of being masculine can be provided to immigrant boys by inviting male guests of their ethnicities who live alternative ways of being a man (e.g. working with disabled, having an artist career, being a home-staying father, being homosexual, etc.). These positive male role models are missing especially in the Arabic, Turkish and Albane communities. (Toprak 2007, p. 225.)

One special focus in gender-sensitive work with immigrant boys is also

the close collaboration with their parents. These have often a very strong impact and guiding role on the adolescents. Many important decisions, like choices for schooling or future professions, are strongly influenced by the parents (Toprak 2007, pp. 224-225). Therefore, special information or advice services need to be offered not only to the adolescents, but also to their parents. This could take place in form of an information evening about educational and professional options which might not be known to people coming from other countries. These events can be starting points for discussions about alternative professions for boys and men. Also workshops for (immigrant) parents on topics like masculinity, gender, violence-free education, managing conflicts within the family or among generations can be part of gender-sensitive pedagogy (Toprak 2007, p. 224).

Gender-sensitive youth work with immigrants does not mean to re-educate and put our Western ideas and values about gender onto them. Instead, it aims to enable them to reflect on their own behaviours and perceptions, and compare these critically with other possible ways to choose from. This way, adolescents with immigrant background become more aware of traditional male stereotypes and gender expectations of different cultures. Subsequently, they have the possibility to choose consciously and in an informed manner what way of living fits best their needs and wishes. (Bentheim, May, Sturzenhecker & Winter 2004, p. 130; Sielert 2007, p. 56.)

"We are born male or female, but not masculine or feminine."

Sandra Bartky

At first glance, the ideas and concepts regarding gender and gender-sensitive pedagogy might seem overwhelming. It might appear challenging to be constantly reflected and aware of what one communicates in order to avoid supporting the "wrong" kinds of roles and stereotypes. Suddenly, professionals might assess with very critical eyes how they present themselves, what kinds of activities they offer, and how they respond to the behaviors of their young clients. Is it still appropriate for a female youth worker to wear a feminine dress at work? Should male youth workers stop organizing the weekly sport events for male service users, and instead get involved in the cooking evenings? Are professionals still allowed to support male teenagers in playing football, or do they thereby just enhance old gender roles? How to react best to exaggerated performances of femininity or masculinity of teenagers? Should these be tolerated, forbidden or challenged? The responsibility to act as an example seems enormous.

Luckily, working gender-sensitively does not mean that one has to be perfectly reflected on all aspects of gender. Too much perfectionism might even reject the young people and therefore hinder the work with them. Instead, youth workers can be examples in searching for and trying out different ways of doing things. They can be examples in reflecting and pondering on different ways of living one´s life and considering what consequences these would entail. Youth workers can be examples in admitting openly that they themselves have contradicting feelings and are sometimes confused about how to behave best in certain situations; that they maybe generally oppose any form of machismo, but still enjoy watching films like James Bond. Or that it is sometimes just fun to dress up in a feminine way although one is in general an emancipated and independent woman.

Youth workers can search and try out together with the adolescents new ways of doing and being: Gender-sensitive work means also to convey the joy of experimenting, trying oneself in new roles - without the fear of failing or being ridiculed. This applies for professionals, as well as for adolescents.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that gender-sensitive pedagogy does not aim to diminish options, but to open up new ones. Challenging does not mean forbidding. Traditional ways of doing gender are still welcomed. However, they should not be "the norm", but just one option among many others. Therefore, gender-sensitive youth work does *not* aim to prevent boys from playing football, nor girls from putting on make-up and dancing ballet. Instead, the objective is to add alternatives, so that everyone has enough options to live a life that suits their personality, needs and desires best - without being restrained by what one *ought* to be or do.

Therefore, boys should be able to freely choose between football, dancing, doing woodwork, painting, skate boarding, singing, writing poems, being funny or serious, wild or shy, active or passive, strong or weak. However, behaviour which does not follow the rules of traditional masculinity is particularly supported and strengthened. Additionally, adolescents who live very much in line with traditional gender roles are encouraged to try out new things in order to explore new sides of themselves.

Gender-sensitive pedagogy aims for personal freedom and expansion of boarders. It takes action against the marginalization of those who do not fit the strict norms of our society. It does not accept only one way of being a man or a woman, and opposes the strict division into male and female. Instead, it advocates for many different ways of being and doing, in between and outside the traditional options. Gender-sensitive pedagogy looks further, beyond gender, not just caring whether one is a boy or girl, a man or woman. It aims to see people as the humans they are, with very different and very individual kinds of skills, wishes, needs and desires, wonderfully colorful and refreshingly out of the norm.

Overall, the goal of gender-sensitive pedagogy is to create a world where separation according to gender is not necessary anymore (Hertling 2008, p. 166).

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"It is not just that social structures shape individuals, but also that individuals shape social structures."

Barbara Risman