

# CHAPTER ELEVEN

## Working with young women and young men to challenge gender stereotypes

“Gender pervades every aspect of our existence and in so doing provides us with very powerful norms within which we as individuals are expected to behave. Gender conscious work ... is political as it challenges the status quo of women and men in our society. It is confrontational in that it disputes the validity of gender roles and stereotypes. It is painstaking as it deconstructs all that is known about masculinity and femininity. It is also reflective as it continually questions workers on how their practice promotes challenges of gender expectations.”<sup>i</sup>

### Introduction

This chapter looks at working with young men and young women in a way that challenges stereotypes associated with their gender. It looks at what we can do proactively to improve the lives of young men and young women – to strive for the point where equality of condition is achieved and everyone’s full potential is realised. It does this by highlighting the different issues that young men and young women face and gives practical ways to challenge the social norms and expectations that often dictate their lives. It also provides a list of references that will help with this approach.



# Terminology

<b>Gender<sup>ii</sup></b>	The word gender refers to the social differences between men and women that are learned, changeable over time and have variations both within and between cultures. For example, although only women can give birth (biologically determined), biology does not determine who will raise children (gendered behaviour determined by society)
<b>Sex</b>	Refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women
<b>Feminism</b>	The advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of political, social, and economic equality to men
<b>Masculinity</b>	Refers to the social roles, behaviours, and meanings prescribed for men in any given society at any one time
<b>Patriarchy</b>	A system based on the belief that men have the automatic right to power and to govern, regardless of merit
<b>Role Models</b>	People whose actions, behaviours and lives we look to and may model ourselves on

For more information on terms see the [‘Glossary of Terms’](#) section at the end of this chapter.

## ‘Gender Conscious’ Practice<sup>iii</sup>

‘Gender conscious’ youth work is about engaging young women and young men in a way that proactively challenges societal issues related to gender, such as inequality and changing male/female roles. It involves interventions and programmes that directly challenge social norms about how young women and young men should live their lives. It can take place with young men and young women in either single sex or mixed sex groups as long as there is a gender specific focus.<sup>iv</sup>

Some youth organisations may decide that single sex groups or activities are appropriate to meet the identified needs of the young people they work with. However, working with single sex groups does not necessarily mean you are doing 'gender conscious' work. For example, running beauty and make-up programmes for young women can re-enforce the stereotypes that young women experience rather than challenge them. Similarly, a football programme for young men may re-enforce stereotypes that they experience. It may be single sex work but not necessarily 'gender conscious' work.

Although gender is an important aspect to a person's identity other factors will also affect the needs of a young person such as their sexual orientation, their education, where they live, their family, social class, religion and cultural and ethnic background. These need to be explored as part of working with young men and young women.

'Gender conscious' practice requires youth workers to explore their own attitudes that they bring to their work and to reflect on their own values around gender.

In the Republic of Ireland, under the **Equal Status Act 2000** and the **Equality Act 2004**, it is unlawful to discriminate against a person on the grounds of their gender in the provision of goods and services, education, sports, access to public facilities and accommodation.



In Northern Ireland **Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998)** and the **Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 (as amended)** make it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of gender

# Demographics

## Youth Sector

In **Northern Ireland (NI)** participation across the youth sector based on gender is relatively equal (51.1% male and 48.9% female). However, for age 16 -25 that figure goes down to 44% for female participation. Young women also participate in lower levels in the statutory youth service (43%) and community based youth clubs (44%).<sup>v</sup>

In the **Republic of Ireland (ROI)** research from 2002 showed that across the youth sector in general there was equal gender participation in youth services, as well as gender equality in youth leaders. However, anomalies between services do exist<sup>vi</sup> and participation rates need to be continually evaluated by individual youth services.

## Wider society

Gendered assumptions, stereotypes and expectations impact upon various aspects of young women's and young men's lives from their family, home and social life; through education and employment to consumption, health, the law and participation levels in politics.

## Employment and representation

One indicator of inequality is that women (North and South) are not proportionately represented at many of the senior decision making levels of society. Key positions in all layers of government, the judiciary, the mass media and other professions continue to be dominated by men. For example, while most teachers are women, at



least half of all school principals are men.<sup>vii</sup> Furthermore, in 2011 in the **Republic of Ireland (ROI)** only 15% of those elected to the Dáil, 30% (18 out of 60) of the Seanad seats and 20% of cabinet positions were women.<sup>viii</sup> Similarly in **Northern Ireland (NI)** only 18.5% of those elected to the NI Assembly are women and 26% (4 out of 15) members of the NI Executive are women.<sup>ix</sup>

In all areas of employment women currently earn less than men. Even where gender differentials (i.e. differences in experience and education) are taken into account, a gap in earnings of 8% remains between men and women in Ireland (North<sup>x</sup> and South<sup>xi</sup>).

## Unemployment

In the **Republic of Ireland**, 2009 statistics show that men are twice as likely as women to be made unemployed. However, current employment rates are nearly equal for men and women in the 15-19 age bracket and are higher for men in the 20-24 age bracket by 5%.<sup>xii</sup>

In **Northern Ireland** for young men under the age of 24, unemployment increased by 240% between 2008 and 2010. For the same period unemployment for young women under 24 years increased by 205%.<sup>xiii</sup>



## Education

There is a sharp contrast to the educational attainment of young women versus young men. Girls (North and South) consistently achieve higher exam results than boys, including a higher proportion of top grades. Young women are also more likely than young men to complete State examinations. In the **Republic of Ireland** 86.5% of females in 2004 sat the Leaving Certificate compared to 82.4% of males. In **Northern Ireland** (2009-2010) 61% of girls achieved two or more A levels compared with 45% of boys and 78% gained at least five GCSE's Grades A\*-C compared with 65% of young men.

Young women (North and South) are more likely to progress to further and higher education: 81% of young women compared to 69% of young men in 2009-10.<sup>xiv</sup> In the **Republic of Ireland** in 2010, more major university awards were achieved by females than males (58% for females; 42% for males). Females also dominate in the graduate output of both Institutes of Technologies (56% are female) and Universities (61% are female).<sup>xv</sup>

Gender conscious youth work gives opportunities to young people to discuss these variables and to look at what differences they can make in their lives to achieve more equal outcomes – both in educational achievement and subsequent employment opportunities. Youth work plays a key role in supporting young men and women to develop their confidence and skills and to find access to employment, training or education opportunities.

[See Chapters 10A and 10B in this Toolkit for more information on supporting young people around education, training and employment](#)





## Mortality

The death rate for young men in the **Republic of Ireland** aged 15-24 is almost three times higher than that of young women and this is largely due to higher suicide and accident rates. In 2007, 378 males compared to 82 women died by suicide.<sup>xvi</sup> More males in the Republic of Ireland die by suicide in Ireland than in road traffic accidents. In **Northern Ireland** 77% of suicides were found to be male. Significant links have been made between how young men express their masculinity and issues such as risk-taking behaviour, educational attainment, anger, suicide, and emotional intelligence.<sup>xvii</sup> Living up to dominant images of masculinity can place immense pressure on young men.

## Gender, marginalisation and multiple identity

It needs to be noted that, while marginalised living circumstances affect all young people, it can present extra challenges for young people who are dealing with other issues e.g. young parents, young Travellers, young people with a disability, minority ethnic young people, early school leavers and those from areas of economic and social deprivation. Furthermore, studies on poverty show that young women in these situations are at particular risk.<sup>xviii</sup>



# Needs and issues for young women and young men

## Differences between young men and young women

Needs and issues for young women and young men are affected by a number of factors. Young men often live very different lives than young women. Different friendship groupings, experiences of education, childcare and domestic responsibilities affect the social behaviours, expectations and opportunities of young women and young men. Traditional or cultural values, limiting employment opportunities and a lack of understanding of gender identity can also contribute to social exclusion. Both young men and young women can experience low self-esteem linked to gender-related pressures which can further result in limited life choices.<sup>xix</sup>

## Needs and Issues of Young Women

### Young women's experiences

Historically, women (and men) have experienced a patriarchal world that has left a legacy of gender inequalities behind. Despite robust social, legislative and policy changes in recent decades many inequalities still exist. In a youth work context young women participate in greater numbers than ever before, and are more involved in leadership roles. However, research shows that young women continue to miss out on opportunities in wider society. Some of this will be because of limiting expectations or outcomes that women can place on themselves that on analysis can be seen to be the result of social conditioning around gender. Having fewer opportunities is also a result of the lower value that is placed on many of the choices that a young woman might want to make. For example, caring and administrative professions, on average,





attract a lower salary than many of the professions that men are traditionally involved in. Lower income subsequently affects a woman's life choices – the home she lives in, the activities she takes part in etc. In striving for opportunities women often feel that they are not 'listened to' and that others do not afford them the same 'authority' as a man saying the same thing.

Women often respond to these experiences and what they see as a patriarchy-based society with anger, defensiveness and hurt. This is also likely to be influenced by the impact of feminism. These feelings can often be directed at males in the immediate social circle without considering that the same history of patriarchy can work against men also. It can result in everyone feeling 'put down', thereby lowering everyone's self-esteem and ability to manage relationships in a positive way. This can be particularly harmful during the teenage years when self-esteem is being developed.

## Femininity

Femininity plays in a significant role in how young women see themselves. Media portrayals, role models and images can dramatically affect the way a young woman is perceived by themselves and society, what interests they may pursue and their expectations around body image. It can put immense pressure on young women to behave in prescribed ways. Peer pressure and women's preference for consensus and 'team work' rather than a competitive approach can put additional stress on young women to conform.



## Body Image

Body image is an area of young women's experience that requires a high level of sensitivity. A surprising and worrying number of young women are dissatisfied with their body image and it may take some time to help them see what they like about themselves and to be comfortable to speak about their own bodies. A study of adolescent girls found that 68% of 15-year-old females are on a diet and of these, 8% are on a severe diet.<sup>xx</sup> In a Northern Ireland survey in 2009, 16-18 year olds were asked what sort of things caused them emotional problems. 50% identified 'appearance' or 'body shape' as their greatest pressure; 64% of these were female.<sup>xxi</sup> Addressing body image issues in youth work settings is important as negative body image problems are a factor in the onset and maintenance of many eating disorders. The prevalence of anorexia nervosa among adolescents stands at about 1%, and that of bulimia nervosa at 1.5-2%. About 10 times more females suffer from eating disorders than males.<sup>xxii</sup>



## Health and well-being

### Alcohol

Young women are regularly portrayed in the media as 'lager laddettes' unconcerned with their own health and well-being. However, the reality of young women's attitudes to health and wellbeing often contrast with this. In a recent study of young women across Northern Ireland, few said that they drank a lot and many had a considerable grasp on safe drinking guidelines. Frequently the root cause of drinking alcohol was cited by the young women as stress or pressure to fit in.<sup>xxiii</sup>

## Smoking

Smoking for young women has only seen a 3% decrease over the last two decades while for young men smoking has decreased by 12% over the same period.<sup>xxiv</sup> This has resulted in the number of women smoking coming much closer to that of men (52.5% men to 47.5% women).<sup>xxv</sup> A Republic of Ireland study puts smoking prevalence at 1 in 7 for 15-17 year olds (14.2%). This rises to 1 in 5 (27.3%) for those aged 18-24.<sup>xxvi</sup> Research shows that image, the building of status within the group and keeping yourself thin are factors in young women choosing to smoke.<sup>xxvii</sup>

## Stress

The demand on young women to achieve academically is often coupled with pressure to play a caring role within families, including the extended family. A recent study (Still Waiting, 2007) found that ‘talking to friends’ was cited as a way of coping with stress but further exploration revealed that young women were less inclined to share deeply-felt troubles with others. Getting on with things was perceived to be a strength and asking for help a sign of weakness.<sup>xxviii</sup>

## Sex and Sexuality

There is a concern that sexual health education within schools in **Northern Ireland (NI)** is inadequate, resulting in young women sourcing information on sex through the internet, friends or other informal sources. This raises questions over the reliability of the information that young women are receiving about sex.

In a recent study in Northern Ireland, embarrassment, fear and shame were noted as underpinning themes in young women’s accounts about sex. The report cites that this is likely to be a result of how gender, sex and sexuality are portrayed through the media and various other social institutions.<sup>xxix</sup>

Consideration and attention needs to be given in youth work settings to healthy relationships, sexual identity and healthy sexual behaviours. Gendered expectations and stereotypes impact on the sexual relationships of young women. Where negative attitudes towards young women and sexuality persist these need to be challenged.



There is also an assumption of heterosexuality among society generally and among young women specifically. This can leave those who do not identify as heterosexual isolated and confused. A lack of reference to homosexuality within school, youth clubs and family settings gives a strong silent message that this identity is deviant.

Young women need to see their sexuality and sexual behaviour positively and opportunities need to be given for a more open dialogue on the issue of sex, sexuality and relationships.

[For more information on sexual orientation see the Chapter 3 of this Toolkit - working with LGBT young people.](#)

## Training and Employment Opportunities

While well over one-third of women are in paid employment in Ireland (North and South), on average, women earn 8% less than men and over half of those earning below the minimum wage are women.<sup>xxx</sup> Moreover, much of the other work in which women are involved, for example, housework, childcare and other caring roles, is unrecognised, unpaid and unquantifiable.

When youth leaders focus on increasing training opportunities and improved educational outcomes for young men, it is vital that young women are not left out of the debate on educational under achievement.<sup>xxx1</sup> Young women have also been disproportionately affected by the recession and they are currently missing out on crucial opportunities for skills development and training that would allow them to compete in the labour market due to the emphasis being placed on upskilling young men.



## Domestic and Sexual Violence

In **Northern Ireland (NI)** around 5 people are killed every year and over 700 families have to be re-housed as a result of violence in the home. It is estimated that one in five women and one in nine men will experience domestic violence in the course of their lifetime. A study in the **Republic of Ireland** indicated that 1 in 7 women in Ireland have experienced severe abuse, defined as ‘a pattern of physical, emotional or sexual behaviours between partners in an intimate relationship that causes, or risks causing, significant negative consequences for the person affected’ while 1 in 16 men had suffered severe abuse from a partner.<sup>xxxii</sup>

### Facts about domestic violence:

- Domestic violence often starts or escalates during pregnancy
- Young adults are more likely to experience severe abuse than older adults<sup>xxxiii</sup>
- A growing feature of abuse is the prevalence of violence in relationships where a couple is not married or living with their partner<sup>xxxiv</sup>
- There is a direct correlation between abuse and who controls decisions about money<sup>xxxv</sup>
- There is a relation between violence and alcohol consumption and although not believed to be a trigger in itself there is concern that alcohol escalates the level and severity of the violence<sup>xxxvi</sup>
- There is an increased risk of abuse where a partner is isolated from close family members and neighbourhood supports. This puts migrants in the higher risk criteria

The threat of sexual violence facing young women is very real, with 54% of rapes in the UK being committed by a woman's current or former partner.<sup>xxxvii</sup> In the **Republic of Ireland** it was found that almost one quarter (23.6%) of perpetrators of sexual violence against women are intimate partners or ex-partners<sup>xxxviii</sup> and the Rape Crisis Centre stated that only 7% of the sexual violence reported to them were committed by strangers.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Sexual abuse also takes other forms. The technological developments of 'sexting' and the use of social media to degrade and exploit young women add an insidious dimension to the types of harassment and violence young women face.



Domestic abuse is not confined to women and this fact should be addressed in a youth work setting. In 2005 the National Crime Council of Ireland<sup>xi</sup> published the first ever large scale study on the nature, extent and impact of domestic abuse against women and men in Ireland. They found that while the severity of abuse against women was at least double that of men and 8 times greater in the case of sexual abuse there were still highly comparable statistics when minor incidents of abuse were considered:

- 29% of women and 26% of men suffer minor domestic abuse
- 13% of women and 13% of men suffer minor physical abuse
- Only 1 in 20 men compared to 1 in 3 women reported the abuse to the Gardaí

The report alerts readers to consider the differing negative impacts that abuse has on its victims.



## Needs and Issues of Young Men

“Research into young men’s issues is consistently highlighting that their lives are increasingly complex, contradictory and potentially dangerous to their well-being.”

Keeping gender on the agenda – YouthAction NI<sup>xli</sup>

### Masculinity

At the centre of young men’s personal development is the role that masculinity plays in their daily lives. It is what makes them behave in a certain fashion; get involved in certain activities and it is masculinity that portrays how young men are seen within the community that they live. Many young men struggle to find their place in a world experiencing rapid social and economic changes and developments. This has had a major impact upon young men’s expectations, behaviour, education, mental health and employability.

The changing role of young men in contemporary society can place significant pressure on them to conform to certain expectations of what it is to be a man. They experience pressure to ‘*become men*’ or ‘*act like men*’ which can lead to young men trying to *prove* that they are men through risk taking, deviant and stereotypical male behaviours.

Harland (2000) presents two expressions of masculinity – the public sphere and the private sphere. In the public sphere young men feel pressure to appear confident and macho believing this is the way to receive status and respect. To affirm their masculine identity, young men are dismissive of their emotional pain, withholding certain feelings and emotions in public. This notion of survival being seen as strong can mean young men are



less likely to avail of the support of others whether in friendship groups or from professionals. In the private sphere young men learn to cope with the anxieties and emotions they have suppressed in public.<sup>xlii</sup>

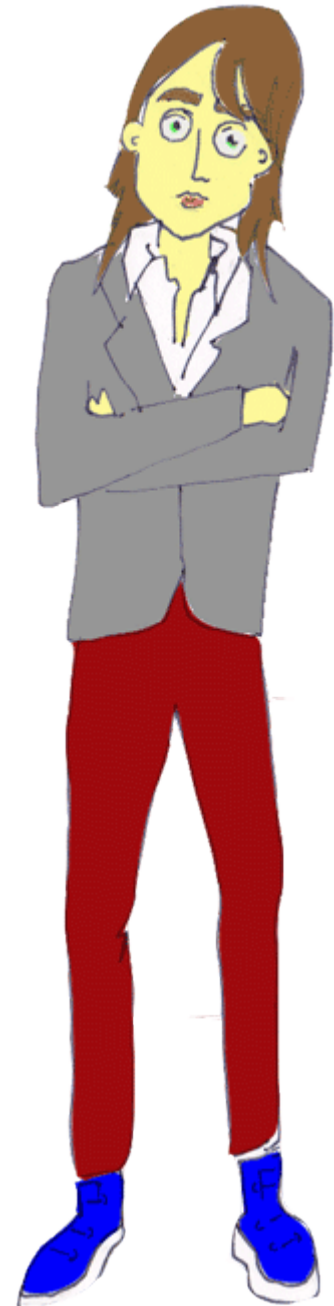
## Health and well-being

Traditional masculine norms play a role in how young men address issues around their health and emotional well-being.

The stigma and messages portrayed around mental health issues in particular means that many young men don't address issues for fear of being labelled as weak and vulnerable to their peers. Social conditioning which promotes the suppression of emotions such as pain, fear, hurt, anger and frustration can be detrimental to positive mental health.<sup>xliii</sup> Expectations on young men to be strong and resilient can mean they are slow to access the relevant support needed from medical and other professionals.

Youth workers, particularly male ones, need to address their own expectations around men's behaviour and how they demonstrate their feelings. They, as well as the young men they work with, need to understand that it is okay to engage with your emotions and feel things strongly.

Risk-taking behaviour amongst young men leads to higher mortality rates and injuries. Staying safe – both in physical and sexual activities - should be addressed by youth leaders.



## Sex and Sexuality

Stereotypical images of the masculine ideal portray men as healthy, heterosexual and experienced. One outcome of this is that many men, in particular young men, fear contradicting this ideal because any divergence from this would lead to ridicule and vulnerability. Young men tend to talk about sex with their peer group through banter and bravado, giving the impression that they are sexually experienced. For many young men there are no opportunities to become comfortable with their sexuality.

The traditional portrayal of masculinity is not associated with men who identify themselves as gay or bisexual. This can present challenges for young men negotiating their masculine identity within the context of being gay or bisexual. Young men who identify other than heterosexual are also likely to find themselves at risk of homophobic bullying, isolation and suicide.

Research carried out by the Rainbow Project has highlighted the extent to which young gay men have actually attempted or considered suicide. 70% of respondents had thought about taking their own lives and 27% had tried to kill themselves. The suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts were directly linked to homophobic experiences and bullying.<sup>xliv</sup>



## Conflict

The media portrayal of violence and expectations around masculinity are deeply ingrained in the experience of many young men. For some young men conflict and violence is part of their lived experience. While they may dislike the pressure to get involved in violent behaviour or being the victim of violence, some are drawn to the excitement and 'glamour' of it, attempting to live up to the tough stereotype of being someone with the capacity to be violent when required.

Managing anger and aggression is something that young men need to learn. Their role models and experiences of masculinity will play a big part in how they deal with these emotions. Some young men may use aggressive behaviour when looking for physical contact or closeness as they don't feel comfortable demonstrating affection or being 'soft' or 'gentle' in public.

### Political conflict

Added to social conditioning around masculinity and attitudes on the need to be 'tough' is the politically motivated violence that has dominated the lives of young men in many communities across Ireland, particularly in the North. Recent trends with dissent violence have placed extra pressure on some young men to look at how they 'defend' their communities from the 'other side'. Many young men feel that it is their duty to protect the community from this perceived threat.



# Working to challenge gender stereotypes

## Participation

Before you can effectively challenge gender stereotypes in your organisation you need to look at gender based participation in your programmes. Look at the statistics on the number of males and females who participated in your group over the past year. If significantly more young men or young women were involved you need to begin to explore why this is the case.

It will also be useful to observe patterns of behaviour in your youth setting.

- Do young women or young men dominate any of the activities you run?
- Which activities are young women or young men more/ less engaged with?

Observe the interactions between young women and young men. If either young women or young men are not attending or not participating equally in your service you may find that the best course of action is to implement strategies specifically aimed at including the under-represented group. This might involve having female-only or male-only programmes or adapting your current activities. Advice on adapting your activities is given in detail below.

If you decide to run male-only or female-only activities be careful not to stereotype interests. For example, young men may be interested in body image related activities and young women may be keen on bike maintenance. Genuine consultation with both genders will ensure that programmes do not reinforce the gender inequalities that you are attempting to challenge.



## Challenging gender stereotypes and inequality

Giving space for gender work involves giving space and time for young people to explore topics such as feminism, patriarchy, masculinity, historical impacts on their lives, social conditioning, adapting to a changing world. It is proactive and a conscious attempt to influence change.<sup>xlv</sup> In order to introduce these topics you might need to cultivate interest from the young people you work with by asking some exploratory questions:<sup>xlvi</sup>

- Being a young woman/man is...
- I hate it when I can/can't...
- At the youth service boys/girls expect me to...
- It's not fair because...
- At the youth service it would be great if...
- At the youth service I would like to be able to...
- What activities would you like to see happen at the youth service just for young women/young men?
- The role models that I see regularly are...
- The role models that I look up to are...
- The messages about masculinity and what it means to be a man are....
- The messages about femininity and what it means to be a woman are....
- When I am upset I respond by...
- When I am angry I respond by ....

## Adapting your programmes

Introduce policies and practices that ensure the participation of both genders in your organisation. Adapt popular activities so that both genders feel comfortable taking part.

If your service is dominated by loud or rowdy behaviour you may consider changing the activities you run. Perhaps your service has a pool table or other resources that are dominated by males while females take on a more passive or observant role? Alternatively, if you run an activity that is dominated by young women, think about how you can increase young men's participation.

Alongside your activities there is a need to be able to respond to situations that arise such as 'sexist language' or 'rough play' and create safe spaces for exploration of gender issues in order to challenge behaviour and attitudes, promote understanding and negotiate for change.



Gender issues will be prevalent in mixed gender settings as well as in single-sex work. They may manifest in the group dynamics and within individual interactions. These issues will reflect those prevalent in the wider society and as such will often reflect the contested space of gender. This usually looks like competition between the sexes which can become accompanied by more aggressive interactions.<sup>xlvii</sup>

## Become aware of your own attitudes and behaviour

Gender issues, like other issues, involves looking at our own value systems and beliefs and being open to attitudinal change. It is important that leaders address these issues for themselves before addressing them with young people. For leaders and workers involved in running programmes it is important to feel comfortable discussing issues with young people. When planning to work on gender-related issues it is good to personally work through any planned exercises in advance before doing them with the young people. This will help to alert you to your own values, attitudes and beliefs as well as your knowledge base and experiences around issues.<sup>xlviii</sup> An important consideration is to listen to the language you use and what it says about your attitudes (and conditioning) about gender and to ask colleagues to reflect back to each other if they hear sexist language or attitudes being inadvertently used (for example saying 'he' in reference to a doctor or lawyer rather than 'he' or 'she', moaning about a woman earning more than her partner etc).



## Consider your actions

In your position as role model the way you behave as a youth worker influences your organisation. It is critical that your behaviour is non-sexist at all times and that you value young women and young men equally.

### Steps that you can take as a youth worker include:

- Promote a positive image of both men and women and their achievements. Think about your promotional material and the guest speakers who come to your service and how this reflects a gender specific image
- Celebrate International Women's Day/ International Men's Health Week and talk about the reasons for these celebrations
- Put programmes in place for young men and young women which challenge gender assumptions
- Challenging stereotypes, attitudes and language will often take place directly with an individual. Be clear and assertive in your message
- Provide education about physical and sexual violence
- Promote non-traditional career options for young women and young men such as nursing, beauty care, etc for young men; mechanics, building, plumbing, professional directorships etc for young women
- Encourage and support young women and young men to play equal and active roles in decision making at your service and at a wider community level
- Talk to the young men and young women who use your service about whether they want a programme just for themselves
- Challenge sexist behaviour and assumptions. This includes "jokes" – for example jokes about blonde women being stupid, women not being able to drive or men not being able to cook
- Model gender-conscious behaviour – men should be seen cleaning; women should be seen doing heavy work and encourage the young people to join you
- Provide accessible, youth oriented services to tackle issues such as body image, mental health etc. Computer-based education or treatment programmes using e-mail in youth centre settings has proved successful for problems such as bulimia or depression<sup>xlix</sup>

Sexual harassment is against the law and you have a legal responsibility to prevent this from happening at your service. Make sure your workers and volunteers know how to respond to any sexual harassment they witness. You should have a section on sexual harassment in your equality policy with clear guidelines as to what staff and volunteers should do.

## Gender in other cultures

Working on gender issues must be seen in the context of the society in which you live. In a society where gender equality and inclusion is clearly an issue, the youth worker must acknowledge their own role in challenging the inequalities that exist – for themselves, for the young people they work with and in society as a whole.

In the context of a multi-ethnic society embedding the principles of gender equality can present additional challenges. Some people from diverse cultural traditions may have different experiences and expectations in relation to gender and these may present themselves during debates, discussions, planning activities etc. Youth leaders – especially female youth leaders – can struggle personally with attitudes that they encounter. It is important to stand back emotionally in these discussions and to see that those with differing views are as highly invested in finding an integrated way to be in the world. It is also important to separate out issues of equality that would directly affect someone's human or legal rights and issues of equality that are to do with social practice.



Some prior knowledge of culture and context will help you be prepared for the attitudes that young people and their parents might present with. Where

strong disagreement arises try to find a common value in discussions that can be used as a platform for learning and understanding. For example, if a young man refuses to make a cup of tea because of his perceived cultural gender role, try and identify the value base behind this. Identify a common value for both e.g. respect. In his culture it might be a mark of 'disrespect' for a man to make a cup of tea, however, you can explain in your culture it is considered a mark of 'disrespect' for a young man to expect a young women to make a cup of tea for them. This can act as a starting point for further discussion and debate.

### Tips for Working with Young Women and Young Men

Tips for working with Young women	Tips for working with Young men
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Your enthusiasm and motivation can inspire young women. Don't underestimate the impact that your intervention can have upon individual young women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Role models are extremely important to motivate and inspire young men. Male youth workers can play a significant role in a young man's life</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Consider how important image can be young women. Think before asking them to do something that may appear foolish. Remember how easily embarrassed young women can get.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Talk to young men about how they deal with embarrassment and what situations are embarrassing for them. Talk to them in particular about how this affects their health</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Talk to young women about the messages they receive about body image, sexuality, employment options etc</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Talk to young men about the messages they receive about behaviour such as drinking, driving, acting protectively (and how to do this), expectations to 'perform' sexually etc</li> </ul>



<p>➤ Talk to young women about the images they see of other women, femininity, men and masculinity. What does it say to them about being a woman and the limitations this puts on them personally</p>	<p>➤ Talk to young men about the images they see of other men, masculinity, women and femininity. What does it say to them about being a man and what limitations does it place on them</p>
<p>➤ Don't assume all young women are interested in beauty and appearance</p>	<p>➤ Don't assume all young men are interested in sports and machines</p>
<p>➤ Providing spaces for young women together to try out new activities will raise their confidence e.g. if you introduce a new sport or invite them to take part in a drama they might prefer to do it with no one watching until they feel they are good at it</p>	<p>➤ Providing space for young men to try out new activities will give you opportunities to talk about risk taking behaviour and the pressures that young men experience to 'perform'</p>
<p>➤ Just because young women don't ask for something doesn't mean they have no needs or have nothing to say. Try to recognise and understand both verbal and non-verbal communication and how young women often use silence or moodiness as a coping mechanism</p>	<p>➤ Just because young men don't ask for something doesn't mean they have no needs or have nothing to say. Try to recognise and understand both verbal and non-verbal communication and how young men often use bravado as a coping mechanism</p>
<p>➤ Take time to look around at how much your youth setting suits young women</p>	<p>➤ Take time to look around at how much your youth setting suits young men</p>

➤ Think creatively about activities that will encourage collaboration and teamwork	➤ Think creatively about activities that will use young men's competitiveness in a healthy way
➤ Think seriously about what messages you as a worker give to young women consciously or unconsciously	➤ Think seriously about what messages you as a worker give to young men consciously or unconsciously
➤ For female workers, you should demonstrate your ability to step out of stereotyped female styles. You can best address issues of femininity if you have addressed them for yourself	➤ For male workers in particular, demonstrate your ability to step out of stereotyped male leadership styles. Male workers can best address issues of masculinity with young men once they have addressed them for themselves.
➤ Going out to meet young women on their own ground and finding out their interests is a practical means of attempting to actively engage them	➤ Going out to meet young men on their own ground is a powerful and practical expression of attempting to actively engage young men
➤ Strive to create a safe environment where young women feel secure enough to interact in a positive way	➤ Work from an understanding of the vulnerability of young men – contrary to an image of 'hardness' – and strive to create a safe environment where young men feel secure enough to interact in a positive way
➤ Make sessions real to the lives of young women	➤ Make sessions real to the lives of young men

Take time to talk and listen to young women and young men on their own – they will say things in single-sex groups they won't say together, especially around sexuality and sexual health issues

If the young men or young women aren't happy to talk about their own circumstances ask them to talk about young men and young women generally – how other young people they know are affected by the issues you are raising

Create opportunities for young men to hear what young women expect from them and vice versa

Discuss the changing roles of young men and young women. Support them to look at how they will adapt to changing roles for themselves

Inform and involve other agencies in the local area in your work with young women and young men on challenging gender stereotypes



# Checklist 11 - How gender conscious is your work with young men and young women?

This checklist can help you to identify how you can improve your service for young men and young women.

## Public image

### How we present our service to our community

- |   |            |               |           |
|---|------------|---------------|-----------|
| • We promote positive images and achievements of young women  | <b>YES</b> | <b>PARTLY</b> | <b>NO</b> |
| • We promote positive images and achievements of young men  | <b>YES</b> | <b>PARTLY</b> | <b>NO</b> |
| • Our service promotes opportunities for young men and young women to develop their skills (including in non-traditional areas) | <b>YES</b> | <b>PARTLY</b> | <b>NO</b> |

## Programme planning and delivery

### Our programmes are designed and delivered to include the diverse needs and identities of young people with a mental health issue

- |  |            |               |           |
|--|------------|---------------|-----------|
| • We gather statistics on the gender breakdown of young people participating in your youth group | <b>YES</b> | <b>PARTLY</b> | <b>NO</b> |
|--|------------|---------------|-----------|

- |   |            |               |           |
|---|------------|---------------|-----------|
| • Our service provides programs which respond to the specific needs of young women and young men  | <b>YES</b> | <b>PARTLY</b> | <b>NO</b> |
| • We provide opportunities to look at aspects of gender, to challenge gender conditioning and to explore equality issues                              | <b>YES</b> | <b>PARTLY</b> | <b>NO</b> |
| • We implement strategies to increase the participation of under-represented genders in our service   | <b>YES</b> | <b>PARTLY</b> | <b>NO</b> |
| • When necessary, our organisation changes the activities it provides to ensure that young women and young men get equal opportunities to participate | <b>YES</b> | <b>PARTLY</b> | <b>NO</b> |

## Professional development

Our staff and volunteers are trained and supported to deliver an inclusive youth service

- |  |            |               |           |
|--|------------|---------------|-----------|
| • Staff and volunteers model non-sexist behaviour in the way they relate to each other, and in the way they interact with young people | <b>YES</b> | <b>PARTLY</b> | <b>NO</b> |
| • Staff challenge any sexist comments or behaviour from young people in their groups   | <b>YES</b> | <b>PARTLY</b> | <b>NO</b> |

- Our organisation provides information about physical and sexual harassment and violence **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

## Policies and procedures

We have a written commitment to deliver an equal and inclusive service

- Our service has policies and rules in place that deal with sexist comments or behaviour **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

## Participation

We make sure we include the voices of young people at all levels of our youth service

- Our service discusses with young women and young men about their needs as young women and young men **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**



## Useful Contacts

- **Amen Helpline 046-9023718**

[www.amen.ie](http://www.amen.ie)

- **YouthAction NI – Gender Equality Unit**

Eliz McArdle

YouthAction Belfast Office

14 College Square North

Belfast BT1 6AS

Tel: 028 9024 0551

[www.youthaction.org/gender-equality/latestnews.aspx?Author=GE](http://www.youthaction.org/gender-equality/latestnews.aspx?Author=GE)

- **YouthAction NI – Work with Young Men**

Michael McKenna

YouthAction Armagh Office

St. Patrick's Trian

38A English Street

Armagh BT61 7BA

Tel: 028 37511624

[www.youthaction.org](http://www.youthaction.org)

- **Gender Equality Unit (OFMDFM)**

Gender Equality Unit

Room E3.19 Castle Buildings

Stormont Belfast BT4 3SR

E: [admin.gender@ofmdfmni.gov.uk](mailto:admin.gender@ofmdfmni.gov.uk)

[www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/index/equality/gender-equality.htm](http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/index/equality/gender-equality.htm)

- **Woman's Aid**

[www.womensaid.org.uk/](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/)

[www.thehideout.org.uk](http://www.thehideout.org.uk) - Women's Aid have created this space to help young people understand domestic abuse, and how to take positive action if it's happening to you.

## GLOSSARY

Gender roles	Gender roles are determined by the systems and cultures in which we live. Because culture changes gender roles also change
Gender Mainstreaming <sup>xix</sup>	Gender mainstreaming can be defined as the process of incorporating gender equality issues into every stage of the development, implementation and evaluation of your policies in order to promote equal opportunities between men and women.
Sexist	Anything that discriminates on the basis on a person's gender
Sexism	Discrimination against people on the basis on their sex
Anti Sexist	Strategies and methods to counter the behaviour, language and policies which discriminate against people based on their gender
Non sexist	Anything which treats or portrays men and women as equal
Non sexist language	Language which includes women and does not for example use 'he' or 'men' or 'mankind' to refer to people of both sexes and vice versa
Non-traditional jobs	Jobs which have traditionally been denied to women or considered as male-only occupations, e.g. building, engineering, plumbing etc. Jobs that have traditionally been considered female-only occupations and therefore denied to men such as nursing, cleaning.
Feminist	A person who is actively working towards a society based on equality for all people, of either gender.

Sexual Harassment	Unwanted and uninvited sexual attention such as touching, comments, suggestions or pressure to have sexual intercourse
Sexual Orientation	How an individual expresses and directs his/her desire. People can direct their desire towards people of the same sex, towards people of the opposite sex and towards people of either sex.
Positive action	Actions that are taken to redress the balance between men and women such as reserving places for under-represented groups.

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