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Gender Equality in the Workplace?

The changing roles of men and women in the American workplace

(Sekundarstufe II)

Objectives

- to give the pupils the opportunity to describe and draw conclusions on visual material, in this case a poster
- to make the pupils aware of the changing roles of men and women in the world of work
- to give the pupils information about the development of the workplace concerning gender equality in recent years
- to develop the pupils' ability to describe and interpret statistics
- to give the pupils the opportunity to exchange their ideas on the topic in an open discussion
- to give the pupils the opportunity to express their ideas in a creative way

The Topic

There is no doubt that over the last 60 years many countries have made significant progress towards gender equality in the world of work where men and women are now increasingly assuming 'non-traditional' roles. A greater recognition of gender in legislation has helped to abolish gender-role divisions to a large extent.

However, although women have become more and more economically independent and socially autonomous, they still have difficulty finding a balance between home and the office due to the fact that the relationship between equality laws and women's work is rather complex. In contrast to men's work the concept of women's work is ambiguous as it can refer either to paid employment or unpaid care and household chores.

Women continue to earn less than men, are less likely to advance their careers as far as men, and are more likely to spend their final years in poverty.

Another important factor in this context is the role of stereotypes standing in the way of equal treatment for women in the workforce as social and cultural norms still influence people's expectations about gender. Men and women who do not behave according to these stereotypes are often seen negatively, e.g. 'career women' or 'stay-at-home fathers'. It still seems very difficult to overcome these obstacles, as childbearing, maternity leave and child care hold many women back from entering or re-entering the workforce.

In addition, women are still less likely than men to be associated with leading positions in the fields of economy and politics. Among the companies in the Standard & Poor's 500-stock index women hold 17% of board seats. In France the proportion of women in boardrooms increased from 12% to 22% one year after legislation was implemented in 2011 requiring board quotas. In Germany women account for 21.9% of the seats on supervisory boards and the aim of the women's quota is to fill at least 30% of the boards with women by 2016.

Sociologists and economists agree that in the long run it is necessary to encourage women to participate in the labour market. The ageing population will lead to a shortage of skilled workers so that society will increasingly depend on high female employment. In order to achieve this aim, it is necessary to provide more flexible workplaces, better parental

leave programmes and more chance for women to get back into the workplace. The following suggestions for a sequence of lessons on gender equality in the workforce are based on the three basic steps of describing a poster, analyzing statistics and dealing with a newspaper article. The focus will be on the development and situation of the American society and economy.

Suggested Treatment

Step 1

Introducing the topic

The pupils can be introduced to the topic of the changing gender roles in the workplace with the help of the poster on **Transparency 1**. They should describe what they can see and explain the various elements of the picture, cf. **W1**. They then finally draw conclusions on who this poster is aimed at (for suggested solutions see **S1**). After dealing with the image the pupils can speculate on and note down their ideas on the following questions:

- *How do you think the roles of men and women in the workplace have changed over the last years?*
- *Are, in your opinion, women and men treated equally at work?*
- *What percentage of women, do you think, hold leadership positions in the field of work?*
- *How many men/women hold non-traditional roles at their workplace?*

Step 2**Analyzing statistics about women in the workplace**

After the speculations in **Step 1** the pupils can now take a look at some concrete facts and figures on **Transparency 2**. They should note down their observations and draw conclusions on the developments that have taken place regarding the role of women in the world of work over recent years, cf. **W1** (for suggested solutions see **S2**).

If necessary, some useful words and phrases that will help the pupils describe charts and diagrams can be found at:

http://moodle.unitec.ac.nz/file.php/1723/English_material_Charts_graphs_and_diagrams_2008.pdf

Step 3**A discussion about the role of women in responsible positions in the world of work**

The fact that women are still clearly at a disadvantage in the workplace and, as a result, are poorly represented in leading positions obviously raises the question why this is the case. In this step the pupils are asked to read the quotations presented in **T1**. The theses are taken from the website of *Business Insider*, a US business and technology news website, on which six different experts voice

their opinions on the question why there are not more women in positions of power:

(www.businessinsider.com/the-great-debate-why-arent-there-more-women-in-positions-of-power-2012-3)

After reading the quotations, the students should use **W1** to make notes about each expert's position, i.e. they explain in their own words the main tendencies in these quotations and try to express their own opinions on the ideas presented. Subsequently they can use their notes and the observations they made in **Step 2** to participate in a general discussion about the topic.

Step 4**Creative work**

These tasks allow the pupils to deal with the topic in a creative way. Use should be made of the background information they have acquired in this sequence of lessons.

— *Imagine you are an unemployed young woman, who has just read an ad for a lorry driver on the Internet. A company offers the training required and an acceptable salary. Write her letter of application to the company in question. Remember to employ the formal aspects of such a letter and to explain why you would so much like to take on such a job.*

- *Imagine the woman in the task above has been invited to an interview for the job. The prospective employer thinks it would be interesting to employ a woman, but he is at the same time rather sceptical. Write down the dialogue between the employer and the young woman.*
- *Imagine a family in which the mother has a leading position in an international company. As she is so involved in her job and her responsibilities, the father and the children have had to take over most of the tasks in the household. They are of the opinion that this situation should not last much longer. Write down the dialogue between the members of the family in which each of them tries to put forward his or her position and to reach a compromise.*
- *Imagine an engineering company has to carry out a prestigious project abroad. The head engineer in charge of the project has fallen ill so that his deputy, a woman, has to take over the responsibility for this project. In a meeting of the managers of the company there is a heated discussion concerning the question if a woman can be sent abroad to lead this project. Write down what is said in the boardroom.*

T1 Why Aren't There More Women in Power? – Various Theses

Read the following theses and note down what you think about them.

Sheryl Sandberg, an American technology executive, activist, and author, who has been the chief operating officer of Facebook since August 2013

- [...] the most important career decision women make is whom they decide to marry.
- Women need to get more comfortable with power
- Women need to take more responsibility for their success
- It's hard to visualize someone as a leader, if she is always waiting to be told what to do.

Jane Wurwand, creator and head of Dermalogica, a skin care line

- Empathy is considered a right-brain quality – “feminine,” for lack of a better word. And this quality is not widely trusted in business these days. In attempt to tough out our current economic crisis, many people are responding with the wrong half of their brains.
- Men have built generations of success upon the process of deflecting emotion from the workplace. This is because business in the industrial age was built upon the steely, military-industrial model. But the factories have closed. [...] Information, interactivity and communication are the most viable products we have to offer, and the rigid model of the past century will never work again.

Maria Bartimoro, an American television journalist (CNBC Television), magazine columnist and author of three books

- Women, myself included, want many balls in the air. So when we leave to start families, oftentimes the men jump ahead in terms of hierarchy.
- Women tend to be satisfied with the status quo. They won't push. Men are aggressive. They'll say they want a raise. Women are more satisfied: they'll say, let's keep it as is; let's not make waves.

Claire Grupp, co-founded Gruppo, Levey & Co. in 1992, a leading American advisory firm

- [...] women's biological reproductive “window” shuts down at the most critically productive years for career building. So if society wants to reproduce itself, women have to do it. And they have to do it before they are 40.
- Until genetic scientists figure out how to effectively freeze eggs so that they are as good as sperm that is made fresh every day, this will not change. The great neutralizer will be when both men and women can preserve their option for biological reproduction on the exact same time frame. Then women will be able to compete on a level playing field, become leaders in their professions by the age of 50, and then have their babies.
- Think about what birth control did for the women's movement. Think about what reproductive control would do for women's career liberation.

Sayu Bhojwani, an immigrant rights and social justice advocate

- Explanations and excuses for this appalling gap in leadership abound, some of which are not only inaccurate but also help perpetuate the gap.
- The most pervasive and damaging of these are that women voluntarily opt out of the work force, women don't help advance other women, and women lack ambition.

Jean Oelwang, the CEO of Virgin Unite, the entrepreneurial foundation of the Virgin Group

- I believe that women haven't been assuming more leadership positions in the world today because the systems we've created often do not place the right value on the strengths that women can bring to the table.
- By the very nature of their role in society, women have evolved certain values that have not yet been fully celebrated within systems that focus on short term financial profits above all else.

(for further information see (www.businessinsider.com/the-great-debate-why-arent-there-more-women-in-positions-of-power-2012-3))

● **W1 Women and the Workplace**



The poster

The statistics

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Various Theses

Expert	Main idea(s)	My comment/opinion
Sheryl Sandberg		
Jane Wurwand		
Maria Bartimoro		
Claire Gruppo		
Sayu Bhojwani		
Jean Oelwang		

● S1 Introducing the Topic

[cf. TR1 and page 1]

What we can see is a relatively simple poster with two young women in the centre against a completely white background. Both women are smartly dressed, the one on the left in a light-coloured blazer and a short black skirt, the woman on the right in a pink trouser suit and a white blouse. The woman on the left is carrying a briefcase. Their clothing suggests that they are both professional women who need to be smart in their jobs. They seem to incorporate vivacity, energy and joy, which implies that they enjoy their work or their positions. Their gesture with their right hands is an obvious expression of mutual success, self-confidence and solidarity.

The wording of the poster needs to be examined closely due to the capital letter of the word 'Like'. This first phrase claims that at the moment women do the same work as men but that their salaries are lower. At the bottom of the poster against the black background we can see the appeal on the part of the Arment Dietrich agency to both men and women to work for a change in this unjust situation.

● S2 Analyzing Statistics

[cf. TR2 and page 2]

All four diagrams refer to the US American workforce.

Women's representation in the US labour force 1970–2010

This graph illustrates the percentage of men and women in the labour force from 1970 to 2010. In 1970 there were over 50% more men in the labour force than women. By 2010 the margin has decreased so much that there are just over 5% more men than women. The largest increase in the employment of women was between 1970 and 1980, increasing by 4.6%. Between 1980 and 1990 women's share of the labour force increased by 3.1%. The pace of growth slowed to 1.1% between 1990 and 2000 and 0.4% between 2000 and 2006–2010.

Women's representation in select occupations 1970–2010 (US)

This bar chart shows that women continue to be overwhelmingly employed in certain occupations that have been traditionally oriented towards the female sex (dental assistants, secretaries, registered nurses). A considerable change may be observed, however, in the percentage of women holding jobs that demand higher education qualifications, e.g. pharmacists, physicians and surgeons, lawyers and judges, although it is remarkable that the higher positions in hospitals and in the legal system are still held by men. Despite the clear increase in the number of women working as civil engineers, it is obvious that the number of jobs in technical professions is overwhelmingly still held by men. Evidently certain occupations have become more appealing for women who most probably have no higher education, e.g. bus drivers, accountants and police officers. Nevertheless, in the case of bus drivers and police officers, men still dominate the profession.

Average hourly earnings 1980–2012 (US)

In this graph a clear development can be seen from the year 1980 to 2012. On the whole young working women today are making more money relative to men their age than their mothers and grandmothers did. This is due not only to the rising earnings of women but also to the falling earnings of men.

The wages for men over 16 as a whole have slightly dropped in comparison to 1980 (an interesting fact when considering that the cost of living has risen enormously in over 30 years), but the wages for men aged 25–34 has dropped from \$20 per hour to just \$16 per hour. Women, on the other hand, have profited over the last 30 years, with a relative wage increase and with little difference between the income of women aged 25–34 and of all women on average. Nevertheless men on average still earn more than women on average.

General conclusions:

On the whole we can draw conclusions from the statistical material that women have made considerable progress at the place of work over recent decades, but that complete gender equality has still not been achieved.