

Activity Two (Tent Two): “Prize Sorting”

In this activity, students will learn how gender is a major sorting force in our society and that this can lead to rigid gender roles that do not encourage the development of the whole person. The group is presented with several toys, including domestic, scientific, nursery, athletic, and medical toys, as well as board and computer games. They will be asked to sort the toys and place them into one of two boxes, one pink and one blue.

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Follow-Up Activity: This can be given as homework or used in class as a supplement to this activity.

Key points to integrate throughout the activity:

- Messages of roles and who we should be are all around us and are often based on gender schema. These messages can be helpful and unhelpful. It is up to us to notice the difference and understand how they influence our choices for good or for bad.
- Notice how a lot of the toys in the pink boxes have to do with domestic tasks, beauty, fashion, self-improvement, nurturing roles, and externally focused imagination. Although girls do and can strive to have futures full of nurturing relationships, they also deserve to be free to choose fulfilling careers and feel good about themselves just the way they are, with or without these feminine features.
- Notice how a lot of the toys in the blue boxes have to do with adventure, being active, independent roles, and an internally focused imagination. Although boys can and do strive to have futures with fulfilling careers, they also deserve to be free to explore ways to develop nurturing relationships and feel good about themselves just the way they are, with or without these masculine features.
- How did youth know that pink box was for girls and the blue box was for boys? The media advertises that certain forms of entertainment are appropriate for girls or boys with colors. We are not saying that girls should wear pink, or that boys should wear blue. Messages about gender are pervasive, sneaky, and restrictive.
- If we keep sending messages with toys that girls can only do certain things and boys can only do certain things, then their options for establishing their identity can be very limited.
- We need to celebrate differences, not exaggerate them.

Supplies:

- 2 boxes of similar sizes. Each should be large enough to hold 8-10 toys. One should be covered with pink paper and one with blue paper (or one box painted blue and another box painted pink).
- 1 net. This could be something like a grocery net bag or a stuffed animal hammock, and should be large enough to hold 15-20 toys.
- Several toys, games, books, movies for participants to sort into gendered categories. Here are some examples:
 - Toys in the pink boxes have to do with domestic tasks, beauty, fashion, self-improvement, nurturing roles, and externally focused imagination.
 - Toys in the blue boxes have to do with adventure, being active, independent roles, and an internally focused imagination.

Instructions:

1. Set up: Put all the toys into a pile at the front of the room. Place each box on either side of the pile. Put the net aside for now.
2. Direct the participants' attention to the stack of toys and the two boxes. Without any prompting or additional directions, tell them to sort the toys into the boxes. Usually, stereotypical "feminine toys" are automatically placed into the pink box and stereotypical "masculine toys" into the blue box.
3. Once the students are done sorting the toys, ask them to sit down. Start a discussion about the gender messages given by the toys that were sorted. This will help them to deconstruct the gender socialization process. Hold up specific toys and ask them questions like,
 - a. "What do you notice about the toys in the pink box? The blue box?"
 - b. "How did you know which box to put those toys in?"
 - c. "What do the toys in the pink box say about the roles of girls, who they can be and what they can do? The roles of boys, who they can be and what they can do?"
 - d. "What toys were difficult to sort and why?"
4. After a few minutes of discussion, ask the students about how they are limited in terms of what toys they are encouraged to play with. Some examples of questions you might ask are:
 - a. "What happens when a girl wants to play with . . . [pick up a toy from the blue box]" or "what happens when a boy wants to play with . . . [pick up a toy from the pink box]"
 - b. "Tell me about a time when you have felt limited by the toys you are encouraged to play with."
 - c. "Tell me about a time when you limited somebody else by the toys you encouraged him/her to play with."
5. Ask a volunteer to stand in one of the boxes (or a girl in the pink box and a boy in the blue box).
 - a. Ask the group, "What it would feel like to the volunteers if they had to fit entirely within the box?" Usually, students reply with "squished," "uncomfortable," "claustrophobic," "stuck," etc.
 - b. Explain that when you place expectations of girls and boys to behave in certain ways and be interested in certain activities, this is what we are doing to them. We are putting them in an uncomfortable, squishy box where they cannot be themselves.
6. Introduce the common net (aka the trapeze net) as a supportive environment, rather than the confining environment of a box. A script to use might be, "In this net, we share all the toys and encourage each other and whoever wanted to play with them. We play with what we think will be fun and what interests us, not what others will think of us." Ask the students to take the toys out of the pink and blue boxes and help you put them in the common net.

End the discussion by saying, "Play with any and all toys and games. Read as many diverse books about men and women as you can, and explore these diverse scenes of texture, music, and

scenery. Choose those things that interest and inspire you, and embrace your individuality! Be yourself!”