

## The Principle of Gender Conformity in Women's Career Development

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**Abstract:** In any domain where a different situation between men and women is observed, the cause is the public's stereotypes on the role, behaviour, appearance, mental abilities, etc. of one or another gender. These viewpoints are obsolete and sometimes do not fit the real situation. One of the domains where a considerable influence of stereotypes may be observed is the choice of an education based on gender. The present paper includes the results of research on the influence of gender conformity principles on women's career development. The research aim is to find out whether the principle of gender conformity is present in women's careers. A questionnaire survey of practicing career consultants was carried out to achieve the aim. The survey revealed what communication theory statements on women might be attributed to women in Latvia and whether there were stereotypes regarding women's and men's professions and whether the glass ceiling might be observed in women's careers. Finally, it was concluded that even though gender equality theoretically existed in Latvia, there were still some stereotypes on men's and women's professions; the glass ceiling was not a widespread phenomenon, while in some kinds of jobs it might be observed, and the reality in Latvia was in line with the gender communication theory and communication differences might be observed for women in a team. The present research will contribute to the understanding of women's career barriers and encourage conducting in-depth research on gender equality in Latvia and the EU.

**Keywords:** women's career, glass ceiling, gender conformity principle, gender equality, adult education.

### Introduction

It is believed that individuals have limited choices of professions and occupations with regard to gender, ethnicity and social class. As regards gender, women have no seemingly limited choices of any profession if it is not historically accepted that this is a men's profession or a job position may be held by an individual of a certain stereotype.

With regard to the equality of men and women, Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union stipulates that equality between men and women has to be ensured in all fields, including employment, occupations and wages (Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union). The equality of men and women is one of the key values in the EU. Already in 1957, the Treaty of Rome which laid foundations for the European Economic Community included a principle that equal wages have to be paid the same work (Konsolidēts EK..., 2001).

The European Union's achievements concerning equality between women and men have positively affected the life of many Europeans. This may be explained by the implementation of the following activities:

- legal acts that stipulate equal treatment;
- an integrated approach to gender equality (gender equality related aspects are integrated into all the domains of government policy);
- specific activities aimed at supporting women (Gender Equality in the European Union, 2011).

A positive trend may be observed over recent years in the EU Member States – the number of women in the labour market increases and better education and training contribute to their achievements. The Strategy for Equality between Women and Men (Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015, 2010) reflects with the European Commission's agenda with regard to gender equality for the period 2010-2015. The European Commission undertakes to contribute to integrating gender equality in all its policies, setting the following priorities:

- equal economic independence between women and men;
- equal wages for the same work;

- equality of rights in making decisions;
- respect, integrity and the termination of gender-related violence;
- contribution to gender equality outside the EU;
- horizontal issues (gender roles, legal acts and administrative instruments) (Strategy for Equality..., 2010).

The Strategy for Equality between Women and Men emphasises the contribution of gender equality to economic growth and sustainable development and advocates the inclusion of the gender equality dimension into the strategy Europe 2020. Europe 2020 is an EU growth strategy for the next decade. The strategy is based on certain activities at the EU and national levels. One of the key targets of the strategy is the employment rate for individuals aged 20-64 that has to increase from the present rate of 69% to at least 75%, and a higher rate of women employment has to be reached as well (Eiropa 2020..., 2010). However, gender differences are still present in the labour market, and women are still more represented in low-wage industries, whereas in job positions that involve decision-making women are represented insufficiently. In Latvia and the EU, gender mainstreaming is used in making gender equality policies, which means that the effects of laws, policies and activities on the situation of both genders are examined for all the domains of activity and at all the levels, and all the government institutions responsible for economic sectors have to be engaged in applying the approach (Plāns dzimumu..., 2012).

On 13 June 2013 in Brussels, the European Institute for Gender Equality presented the European Union Gender Equality Index. The index shows the differences in various domains between women and men for all the EU Member States. The Gender Equality Index is a unique instrument that contributes to fact-based government policies and indicates the political priorities to be changed in order to foster the formation of a gender-equal Europe (Gender Equality Index area, 2013). The average score of the Gender Equality Index for the European Union is equal to 54 (1 means absolute gender inequality and 100 stands for full gender equality). Latvia's index score was lower than the EU average, 44.4; the index score of Estonia was 50.0 and that of Lithuania stood at 43.6. The highest scores of the index of equality between women and men were in the Nordic countries: 74.3 in Sweden, 73.4 in Finland and 73.6 in Denmark, as well as in the Netherlands with 69.7 and Great Britain with 60.4. The lowest ones were in Romania with 35.3 and in Bulgaria with 37 (Gender Equality Index in Latvia, 2013). The Gender Equality Index shows the averages indicators in the following domains of gender equality: work, money, knowledge, time, power and health. At the European Union level, the greatest difference between men and women was observed in the domain of power, with the gender equality score standing at only 38. This was the only domain in which Latvia's score was higher than the EU average, reaching 38.6 (Estonia had 27.5 and Lithuania had 32.1). The second domain with the greatest difference between both genders was the domain of time. This is the domain which involves indicators on time being spent on caring for children and other family members and performing household duties and on voluntary work and other leisure time activities. The average gender equality score in this domain for the EU stood at 38.8. In Latvia it was 35.2, 24.1 in Lithuania and 51.4 in Estonia. In the domain of health, Latvia's score was the lowest among all the EU Member States, 77.1, which was far behind the EU average, 90.1. Lithuania's score in this domain was 84.9, while Estonia's score stood at 83.8 (Gender Equality Index in Latvia, 2013).

The health indicator analyses differences in health condition between the genders not only in terms of self-assessment, as Latvia's women assess their health lower than men, but also in terms of life expectancy, healthy years of life and availability of medical and dental services (Gender Equality Index in Latvia, 2013). The research aim is to find out whether the principle of gender conformity is present in women's careers.

## Methodology

A survey of practising career consultants was conducted from December 2014 to January 2015 in order to find out whether career consultants have practically observed gender communication differences during their consultations as well as work equality problems for women. The survey involved 48 career consultants aged 26-62, and all of them were women.

Research tasks:

- to give a theoretical discussion on the principle of gender conformity in women's careers;
- to analyse the principle of gender conformity in women's careers in the consultation process from the viewpoint of respondents.

Legal acts and other information sources were used to achieve the aim and execute the tasks. To analyse statistical data, statistical analysis methods were employed: descriptive statistics. A sociological research method – a questionnaire survey – was used to identify the principle of gender conformity in women's careers. Research sites: social networks.

## Results and discussion

In any domain where a different situation between men and women is observed, the cause is the public's stereotypes on the role, behaviour, appearance, mental abilities, etc. of one or another gender. These viewpoints are obsolete and sometimes do not fit the real situation, as well as there is a disproportion of women and men at all educational levels, especially among preschool pedagogues. The traditional choice of an education and career based on gender is one of the most significant factors for segregation in the labour market by gender and, accordingly, for differences in wages between men and women, for an inelastic labour force, etc. The objective of gender equality policies in Latvia is not to reach equal numbers of men and women in all professions or industries, but to reduce the visible and invisible obstacles that prevent women and men from choosing a non-traditional education and profession for their gender (Plāns dzimumu..., 2012).

Fortunately, a positive trend towards women's equality might be observed in the labour market over recent years. Nevertheless, there are industries where mainly women are employed and vice versa. An analysis of data of the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) for the period 2009-2013 reveals that in 2013, there were domains in Latvia where women were more often represented than men, and they were: in education women were more employed than men by 12.0%, in health and social care by 7.5% and in marketing by 6.8% (Nodarbinātie pēc..., 2009-2013).

The data of the Central Statistical Bureau broken down by profession and gender for 2014 (Figure 1) reveal that there were professions in Latvia in which women were much more represented than men: among service and marketing employees, women were 16.0 percentage points more represented than men, among senior specialists 10.6 percentage points, among servants 5.7 percentage points and among specialists they were 5.8 percentage points more represented than men.



Fig.1. Percentage distribution of employees by profession and gender in Latvia in 2014.

Source: csb.gov.lv (Nodarbinātie pa vecuma..., 2014).

Foreign scientists research the choice of a profession based on gender by employing the gender conformity approach in career education. The principle of gender conformity is described in detail in communication theories. Communication skills relate to every individual's individual career, too, and are an important indicator of social competences, which are appreciated by the whole society, for every specialist, as the inability to be a good communication partner is often an obstacle to an individual's career growth.

The issues on differences in communication between opposite genders have become urgent owing to both globalisation and the feminist movement, and the feminist movement in industrially developed countries has at last a 150-year long history. Gender communication theories (Tannen, 1990, 1992, Kramarae, 1996, Benhabib, 1992) explain and help reassess the unreasonable stereotypes, established in societies, on the roles and functions of genders. Our stereotypes on femininity and masculinity influence communication both in the family, at the job and in the community; accordingly, the communication theories that explain differences in communication between women and men can be very useful in understanding how to make successful careers. The phrase glass ceiling is used to refer to women's careers and their development and constraints. In government policy documents, the phrase glass ceiling is referred to as the term vertical labour market segregation – the tendency of men and women to take different job positions in the same profession or profession group (Kīkule, 2006).

In her research studies, Johanne Toussaint mentions that the glass ceiling refers to an invisible barrier that prevents minorities and women from moving up the career ladder regardless of their qualification or achievements. Initially, the metaphor was applicable to barriers particularly in women's careers, but soon it was extended to refer to the obstacles preventing men of minorities, as well as women, from progress. The phrase glass ceiling refers to an invisible barrier that does not allow women to do success in their careers. This metaphor is most often used with regard to women who are not able to move up the career ladder at their job. The metaphor glass ceiling is an excellent way how to describe a situation that prevents women from reaching the heights of career, compared with men. Theoretically, nothing obstructs women to pursue an ascending career; a barrier is put by stereotypes. For this reason, this ceiling is referred to as a glass ceiling. A woman can clearly see that those who are ahead of her are much stronger and cannot achieve the same results; she is stopped by invisible forces that do not allow her grow further (Napikoski, 2014).

The glass ceiling involves barriers for vertical growth in careers, unequal wages paid for the same work and the loss of professionalism during the maternity leave.

David A. Cotter defined four distinctive features or criteria – if they are met, one can conclude that the glass ceiling is present. The glass ceiling takes the form of inequality if the following phenomena are present:

- a gender or racial difference that is not be explained by other job-relevant characteristics of the employee;
- a gender or racial difference that is greater at higher levels of an outcome than at lower levels of an outcome;
- a gender or racial inequality in the chances of advancement into higher levels, not merely the proportions of each gender or race currently at those higher levels;
- a gender or racial inequality that increase over the course of a career (Cotter, Hermsen, 2001).

One can distinguish the following barriers:

- social barriers that manifest as conscious and unconscious stereotypes and prejudices concerning gender and ethnicity;
- internal activity barriers; obstacles related to entrepreneurship are as follows:
  - submission of information (job advertisements etc.) and hiring practices that do not result in hiring women;
  - dominant culture (e.g. a white man), which isolates women in such a corporative climate;
  - lack of mentoring in management training;
  - insufficient opportunities for a career adapted for training and rotation at the job;
  - specific or different standards to evaluate performance;

- biased evaluations and control systems;
- limited availability or unavailability of informal network communication;
- unproductive behaviour and the harassment of colleagues.
- governmental barriers are as follows:
  - lack of control and consistent legal protection;
  - imperfections in the collection of data on employment; it is difficult to identify the status of social groups at national level;
  - inadequate reporting and dissemination of information concerning the glass ceiling;
- other barriers:
  - different wages for the same work;
  - sexual, ethnic, racial and religious discrimination or harassment at the job;
  - lack of government policies for family-friendly jobs (policies discriminating homosexuals, aliens, elderly or lonely individuals);
  - exclusion from informal networks;
- stereotypes and prejudices on the role and abilities of women (Cotter, Hermesen, 2001).

Discrimination at the job usually takes place because of several essential factors: age, gender, nationality; therefore, it is difficult to distinguish the discrimination oriented towards an employee just because the employee is a man or a woman. The fact of discrimination is not always obvious and may be identified directly, it can be indirect – a seemingly neutral event, criterion or practice that create or can create negative consequences for individuals of the same gender (Ķīkule, 2006).

In Latvia, the legislation stipulates the equal treatment of men and women and bans any kind of discrimination. Such rights are guaranteed both by the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia and by labour laws. Equal wages, working conditions as well as equal treatment during the entire period of employment, including promotion in the job, professional training as well as termination of the labour relationship are set from the very beginning of establishing relationships with potential employees when the first contact is made during a job interview and when a labour relationship is established through concluding a labour contract.

The labour law provides that in case an employer has violated the ban on different treatment, the employee involved has the right to demand an adequate compensation that is set by a court based on its considerations. The labour law prohibits differential treatment based on race, skin colour, age, disability, religious, political or other conviction, national or social origin and property or marital status of an employee (Darba likums, 2001).

At the European Union level, the principle of equal treatment concerning promotion in the job is regulated by a Directive adopted in 1976 (No 76/207/EEC) and amended in 2002 (No 2002/73/EC) (76/207/EEC, 1976, 2002/73/EC, 2002) (Eiropas Padomes..., 1976).

In Latvia, it is not possible to identify the administrative level having this invisible and insuperable barrier for women, yet, the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia (LBAS) admits that this glass ceiling exists in Latvia as well (Ķīkule, 2006).

According to LBAS data, such a barrier is most often present in large enterprises, organisations with bureaucratic structures and institutions involved in making policies. For instance, in the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia (it unites Latvia's employers employing more than 50 employees, producer associations of important economic sectors and regional associations and federations), which actively advocates the elimination of gender discrimination and the observance of gender equality principle in practice, there is only one woman among 14 members of its Council and also one woman among its seven vice-presidents. The mentioned fact fully reflects the situation – mainly men represent the governing bodies of the large enterprises and producer associations in Latvia (Ķīkule, 2006).

It is difficult to regulate the glass ceiling phenomenon by means of the legislation, as it is, to a great extent, associated with the public's understanding, stereotypes and gender roles. Because of stereotypes on women who, due to various reasons, for instance, are not able to cope with large stress, make emotion-based decisions and spent a lot of time on their children, the management of a company is entrusted to a man; in this case, it is likely a woman will have to prove that the mentioned stereotypes are not attributed to her and she is an equal candidate. Men may not be blamed for glass

ceiling situations, as women often believe that high-rank job positions may be held only by men, women lose a lot of their femininity if holding a leading job position and that men are smarter and better managers.

### Differences in gender communication

There are several communication theories:

- *Gender communication styles* (Tannen, 1990, 1992). The purpose of the theory is to acknowledge and evaluate communication styles with the opposite gender and to achieve mutual respect and understanding. The theory emphasises that particularly the communication differences lead to misunderstandings and ambiguities. The communication styles of men and women are not only two different kinds of communication – they are two different cultural dialects. As regards communication differences in a team, cooperation and conversation is important for women and the change of rules of game does not create any problems. Women use a conversation to express their interest in other individuals and their needs in order to cooperate. Women use a conversation as a tool to generate ideas, solve problems and establish relationships. The process of a conversation itself is important for women. The world perspective of women is based on care and responsibility. Communication between women and men is characterised by different communication norms and different communication usage principles, and these differences can hamper mutual understanding.

There are words in any language that may be often attributed to women's domains of activity (sewing, housekeeping, cooking and bringing up children). In a conversation, women are characterised by cheerful voice intonations and by asking questions requiring confirmation (is not it? Yes?), emphases (e.g., such, much) and very polite constructions of sentence (e.g., would you, please, close the door). Differences may be also observed in the skill to listen, in the usage of paralanguage and in providing feedback. Women, during a conversation, can stay within the same conversation topic for a long time.

The theory on gender communication styles reveals that men and women, unconsciously, communicate in different ways. This theory contributes to mutual respect and understanding, pointing that the style of communication between both genders has to be appreciated and respected. The theory contributes to communication competences, as we have to understand and appreciate the communication of both genders because it can become more effective and appropriate, and we have to learn to adapt to the styles of both genders.

- *Muted Group Theory* (Ardener, Kramarae, 2014). This theory states that individuals with smaller influence are difficult to perceive by others (cooperation partners, managers and subordinates); consequently, they are forgotten, their ideas and activity are silenced and they are made unobvious. The theory revealed why some social groups are excluded from communication:
  - owing to gender;
  - men are more active than women;
  - muted status is perceived as a lower status in society.
- Men and women perceive the world differently, as they have different perception formation experience, as well as men and women have different experience in performing various tasks in society. However, women have a possibility to transform their unique ideas, experience and role in men's language to be heard (Ardener, Kramarae, 2014).

The theory explains how women perceive the world and how the world perceives women, and why some groups in society are muted or not listened to. Men and women perceive the world differently, as they have different experience in playing different roles in society. In society, the perception of women is regarded as less competent and less effective. Women should transform their ideas and experience in men's language in order to be listened to. It is important that women and men become equal partners in terms of formation and usage of their language. If their languages become equal, their power will also equalise.

- *Interactive Universalism Theory* (Benhabib, 1992). The theory offers a new communication ethic based on the concept of universal interaction among individuals. S.Benhabib's purpose was to extend the social norms so that they fit everyone. Communicative ethics mean that all people are

responsible for the voices that are not heard and have to understand the silenced voices. From the feministic perspective, S. Benhabib believes that a woman's ego may not be divided into a public and a private ego. Women cannot often afford to be autonomous due to their maternity status. The author of the theory demands respect against everyone and pursue possibilities for discussion on any matter.

- *Standpoint Theory* (Communication Theories in Practice. Standpoint Theory, 2014). The theory views the world from a very feministic perspective. The theory's developers and researchers are Sandra Harding and Julia T. Wood who assert that through conducting a perspective examination of women we can get a new perspective on key problems. The best example is a research study carried out to reveal the way the world functions from the perspectives of women and other social groups being excluded from society. This would give us women's opinions, and a situation analysis would be unbiased. The theory explains that people are present at various locations and different times, their opinions are different and, consequently, their perspectives on the future in the world are diverse. According to the theory, opinions are diverse due to different genders, races, sexual orientations and, accordingly, there are different development perspectives. Women in various countries (especially in the USA) face much more unjust situations owing to the gender. For instance, they often face prejudices at the job, as there are stereotypes that women are emotional and cannot adequately react on stressful situations at the job. The same relates to violence against women – rapes and sexual violence; as a result, they are even afraid to leave their home in their daily life. Standpoint Theory shows that there has to be a possibility to see the world from the perspective of excluded social groups in order to reveal and understand how the world functions (Communication Theories..., 2014).

The issues on differences in the perception and communication of women and men are very urgent nowadays. Due to these differences and due to the misunderstanding of these differences, a lot of conflicts in families and at the job arise. Already in the 1980's, K. Gilligan (1982) researched women's psychological development, concluding that a woman in her nature was mainly tended towards a relationship, whereas a man tended towards independence. According to E. Liebert (Liebert, 2000), gender inequality begins early in the childhood when a child, being brought up in a family, learns various roles and values. The child identifies him/herself with the parents, copies their behaviour and relationship patterns. The child learns that girls have to play with dolls, whereas boys have to do it with machines and weapons. Later on, the culture and society present us examples of ideal women and ideal men, thus drawing the boundaries. N. Slee (2003) emphasises the influence of androcentrism on the choice of a profession, saying that women's talents and endowments are often refused owing to their family duties (Slee, 2003). The self-confidence of women is often linked to the body's size, their slimness or corpulence, sexual attractiveness, hair and skin colours and virginity (Stevenson-Moessner, 2000).

A survey of practising career consultants was conducted from December 2014 to January 2015 in order to gain insight into the principle of gender conformity in women's careers. The survey involved 48 career consultants. The respondents were given statements from communication theories on the communication of women and the key stereotypes on women's careers in Latvia (Table 1).

Table 1

**Respondents' opinions on the influence of gender conformity principles on women's careers**

No	Do you agree with the assertions that in Latvia	Yes	No
1	the "glass ceiling" is present in women's careers	27.1	72.9
2	there are stereotypes on women's and men's professions	79.2	20.8
3	equal wages are paid for the same work regardless of gender	43.8	56.3

No	Do you agree with the assertions that in Latvia	Yes	No
4	for women, communication in a team is different (according to D.Tannen (1992))	79.20	20.8
5	during the course of conversation, women easily change the rules of game (according to D.Tannen (1992))	50.0	50.0
6	for women, cooperation and the course of a conversation itself are important ((according to D.Tannen (1992))	83.3	16.7
7	in order to cooperate, women use conversation to express their interest in other individuals and their needs (according to Tannen) (according to D.Tannen (1992))	85.4	14.6
8	women's world perception is based on care and responsibility (according to D.Tannen (1992))	72.9	27.1
9	communication between men and women is characterised by the communication norms and different language usage principles, and these differences can obstruct their understandings ((according to D.Tannen (1992))	60.4	39.6
10	in a conversation, women are characterised by cheerful voice intonations and by asking questions requiring confirmation (is not it? Yes?), emphases (e.g., such, much) and very polite constructions of sentence (e.g., would you, please, close the door) (according to D.Tannen (1992))	75.0	25.0
11	during a conversation, women can stay within the same conversation topic for a long time (according to D.Tannen (1992))	45.8	54.2
12	women being quiet are excluded from communication at their job and their career growth opportunities in their team are limited (according to K. Kramarae (1996))	72.9	27.1
13	women having a family and children have limited choices of a career (according to K. Kramarae (1996))	47.9	52.1
14	women are "emotional" and cannot adequately act in a stressful situation at their job (according to S. Benhabib (1992))	18.8	81.3

Table 1 shows that the majority of the career consultants questioned agreed to the following statements:

- women use conversation to express their interest in other individuals and their needs in order to cooperate (85.4%);
- for women, cooperation and the course of a conversation itself are important (83.3%);
- for women, communication in a team is different (79.2%);
- there are stereotypes on women's and men's professions (79.2%);
- women's world perception is based on care and responsibility (72.9%).

The career consultants did not agree to the following statements:

- women are "emotional" and cannot adequately act in a stressful situation at their job (81.3%);
- the "glass ceiling" is present in women's careers (72.9%);
- equal wages are paid for the same work regardless of gender (66.3%).
- The respondents' statements:
- women are overworked more than men;
- women's careers depend on the profession chosen, the place of work and their features of character;
- when answering these questions, three various/different types of women were standing in front of me, and each of them would likely have other answers. A woman working in a publicly popular sector – she is obstructed by neither her family status, nor her children, nor her emotionality. A woman applying for a high-rank job position but having no connections would be discriminated owing to both the age of her children, her emotionality and her mental



instability in stressful situations. The charm of femininity (in this case I do not mean external appearance because it may be bought and is unimportant) of a woman holding a high-rank job position for some period changes. She becomes masculine no matter whether she wants it or not and is aware of it or not;

- essential roles are played by the situation, the age of a woman, her education level, the sector she works in and other factors;
- women's communication is abundant, they are emotionally intelligent, whereas men's communication is business like, their expressions are specific and concise;
- the public's stereotypes are deeply rooted and influence the development of women's careers; there are stereotypes on women's and men's jobs. Men gradually disappear from the pedagogue profession, which might cause negative consequences in the future;
- the key value is family; therefore, a woman is mainly seen as a mother;
- differences have to be seen in biological, social and psychological contexts rather than in the context of genders. Women's communication and perception of life depend on their traits of character, temperament, specifics of higher nervous activity, mental sentiment and competences;
- differences between women and men (not only physically but also psychologically) are likely to be determined by nature;
- women and men differ purely psychologically – in their way of thinking, emotions etc.;
- gender differences exist between men and women, yet, these differences do not considerably influence the execution of work. Gender discrimination is present at the job in Latvia; men more often hold higher-rank job positions and are paid higher wages;
- nowadays, women are quite self-sufficient, confident, motivated and knowledgeable and can work (manage) just as well as men. Fortitude and decisiveness and sometimes empathy and flexibility are characteristic of women;
- I believe that in our society a woman is able to make her own career; it depends on her motivation and education;
- it is still difficult for a woman to find a job;
- it is difficult to build up a career in small towns, and some connections are necessary.

## Conclusions

The author concludes that gender differences exist, and it influences women's careers because:

- gender differences are still present in the labour market, and women are still more represented in low-wage industries, whereas in job positions that involve decision-making women are represented insufficiently;
- at the European Union level, the greatest difference between men and women was observed in the domain of power, with the gender equality score standing at only 38. This was the only domain in which Latvia's score was higher than the EU average, reaching 38.6 (Estonia had 27.5 and Lithuania had 32.1);
- the traditional choice of an education and career based on gender is one of the most significant factors for segregation in the labour market by gender and, accordingly, for differences in wages between men and women, for an inelastic labour force, etc.;
- the objective of gender equality policies in Latvia is to reduce the visible and invisible obstacles that prevent women and men from choosing a non-traditional education and profession for their gender;
- fortunately, a positive trend towards women's equality might be observed in the labour market over recent years. So it can be concluded that the principle of gender conformity is observed.

Scientists research the choice of a profession based on gender by employing the gender equality approach in career education. The principle of gender conformity is described in detail in communication theories (the Glass Ceiling refers to an invisible barrier, different gender communication styles, Muted Group Theory, Interactive Universalism Theory, Standpoint Theory). Communication skills relate to every individual's individual career. These communication theories

explain and help reassess the unreasonable stereotypes, established in societies, on the roles and functions of genders.

According to the author, the principle of gender conformity includes the following aspects:

- economic independence;
- equal wages for the same work;
- the glass ceiling on the way to a higher-rank job position;
- it is still more difficult for women to find a job;
- stereotypes on women who, due to various reasons, for instance, are not able to cope with large stress, make emotion-based decisions and spent a lot of time on their children, the management of a company is entrusted to a man; in this case, it is likely a woman will have to prove that the mentioned stereotypes are not attributed to her and she is an equal candidate.

Communication differences of women:

- nowadays, women are quite self-sufficient, confident, motivated and knowledgeable and can work (manage) just as well as men;
- fortitude and decisiveness and sometimes empathy and flexibility are characteristic of women;
- women's communication and perception of life depend on their traits of character, temperament, specifics of higher nervous activity and mental sentiment;
- women's communication is abundant, they are emotionally intelligent, whereas men's communication is business like, their expressions are specific and concise.

The career consultants questioned in the survey agreed to the following statements: women use conversation to express their interest in other individuals and their needs in order to cooperate (85.4%), for women, cooperation and the course of conversation itself are important (83.3%), for women, communication in a team is different (79.2%), there are stereotypes on women's and men's professions (79.2%) and women's world perception is based on care and responsibility (72.9%).

In contrast, negative answers were given on the following assertions: women are "emotional" and cannot adequately act in a stressful situation at their job (81.3%), the "glass ceiling" is present in women's careers (72.9%) and equal wages are paid for the same work regardless of gender (66.3%).

After analysing the data, the author concluded that even though gender equality theoretically existed in Latvia, there were still some stereotypes on men's and women's professions; the glass ceiling was not a widespread phenomenon, while in some kinds of jobs it might be observed, and the reality in Latvia was in line with the gender communication theory and communication differences might be observed for women in a team. Nevertheless, research on this domain has to be continued.

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