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Fl.r.St. - Fight Gender Stereotypes

2022-1-IT02-KA210-ADU-000080880

Programme: Erasmus+

KA210-ADU – Small-scale partnerships in adult education

General Objective:

- Create and strengthen a network of non-profit organizations that fight to combat the gender stereotype through the visual communication of the art of painting, visual graphics, and photography.



Specific Objectives:

- Break the female stereotype with particular reference to motherhood and pregnancy.
- To define communication strategies, tools, and channels to promote networking activities and the activities developed
- Exchange experiences and best practices

Results:

- Community involvement and other women and mothers through the international survey
- Manual of visual communication techniques combined with non-formal methodology as a means of learning
- List and visual narration of the most common stereotypes on motherhood
- Closing Meeting with an artistic exhibition on the work done.



International
Initiatives for
Cooperation





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Non Formal Education

Non formal education refers to educational processes happening in a structured, organizational setting that stands in a complementary relation with academic, formalized education. Youth Organisations, NGOs and Communities are typical executors with the goal to teach skills and abilities typically overlooked by school systems. This can be soft skills, artistic abilities, skills related to digitalisation or languages. The following list entails criteria that should be fulfilled for the most part, in order for an activity to be considered non formal education: voluntary participation, accessibility to everyone, clearly organized processes with educational objectives, participatory approaches, learner-centered approaches, focus on learning life skills and preparing for active citizenship, involvement of individual and group learning with a collective approach, holistic and process-orientation, base on experience and action, organization on the basis of participant's needs of the participants. (European Youth Foundation)

Non Verbal Communication

Nonverbal communication entails all kinds of communication that is not transmitted through the use of spoken and/or written words. Typical aspects mentioned are body language, facial expressions, gestures, posture, eye contact and movement, tone of voice, the use of space an individual takes up in an environment. Nonverbal cues play a significant role in conveying emotions, attitudes, intentions and relationship dynamics in interactions. Depending on the content of the situation, they can reinforce the message a communicator shares with words, but they might also be contradicting the original message, add something to it or replace it completely. Several studies suggest that up to 93% of communication might in fact be nonverbal, but be transported through facial expressions and the tone of voice (Lapakko, 2015)



Non Verbal Communication Through Art

Art has always had the role of functioning as a way to communicate between people. Goya secretly drew himself into famous portraits to change the perspective of only showcasing people of status, the positioning and view directions in Da Vinci's last supper are suspected to communicate critique against intrigue within the Catholic church and Banksy openly uses his street art to criticize capitalism, consumerism and war.

Through emotional expression, cultural representation, social commentaries or personal reflection, art as a universal language can be used in various ways to be more than just decoration. While in ancient times art used to be a valuable form of communication and a silent protest against superiorities, nowadays it has the potential to be part of social change and cultural expression.

Elements like colors, lines, structure, composition, texture can convey messages and transmit messages that go even beyond the symbolic message of the object portrayed.

Photography specifically is an art form that focuses on composition, lighting, framing, perspective and subject matter to communicate without relying on words.

It can evoke strong emotions and convey complex messages through the depiction of objects, environments, and moments. For example, portraits can capture subtle nuances in facial expressions and body language to convey emotions such as joy, sadness, or contemplation. Landscape photography can use lighting and composition to evoke feelings of tranquility, awe, or solitude.

Photography also serves as a storytelling medium, capturing a zeitgeist or recording events, culture, and social issues and communicating them to viewers in a visually appealing way. For example, photojournalism relies heavily on capturing moments that convey the essence of a story or event, without explaining their work with a title or text.



Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are general opinions or preconceptions about the attributes, characteristics, or roles that society associates with different genders. These stereotypes can limit a person's ability to develop personal abilities, pursue a professional career, and make choices about life. Most importantly, they consciously or unconsciously influence the way we see ourselves, our communities and the society we live in.

Harmful stereotypes perpetuate inequality and often manifest in either overtly hostile or seemingly harmless ways. These have a disproportionate negative impact on certain groups of women, such as minority or indigenous women, women with disabilities, and women of low economic status. Also maternity and pregnancy are areas specifically affected. Gender stereotypes attribute certain attributes, characteristics, or roles to people based solely on their gender and are illegal if they result in a violation of human rights or fundamental freedoms. Examples include the lack of criminalization of marital rape, the perception of women as sexual property of men, and the lack of investigation and prosecution of sexual violence against women. False gender stereotypes contribute to discrimination against women and violate a wide range of rights, including the rights to health, education, work, political participation and protection from gender-based violence. Nonetheless it is also important to keep in mind that gender stereotypes are not only affecting women but also men or individuals identifying as diverse (Ohchr.org, End Gender Stereotypes)



Gender Stereotypes in Bulgaria, Germany, Italy and Turkey

Gender Stereotypes in Bulgaria, Italy, Germany and Turkey might remarkably deviate from each other. While the general outcome of gender inequality stays remotely the same, it is crucial to understand the extent they affect varying areas of life in order to challenge them successfully.

In **Bulgaria**, traditional gender roles are deeply ingrained in society, dictating that women prioritize family and domestic duties over career pursuits. Women are often expected to embody the roles of primary caregivers and homemakers, with limited societal support for alternative family structures or career paths. There is little to no support for working moms or those who want and need to keep working during pregnancy. This societal pressure can restrict women's choices and opportunities, particularly in terms of pursuing careers in fields traditionally dominated by men. Many women are expected to leave their jobs when they start motherhood. Furthermore, expectations of modesty and virtue further constrain women's autonomy, reinforcing traditional gender norms and expectations in their behavior in and outside of the workplace.

In **Germany**, despite considerable progress towards gender equality, women often find themselves navigating the delicate balance between successful careers and family responsibilities. The stereotype of the 'working mom' persists, with women expected to excel in their professions while also fulfilling traditional caregiving roles at home. While fighting towards more possibilities for working moms has a remarkably positive influence, the expectation of simultaneously being caretakers and homemakers lead to an overburdening of many working moms. To add to that, in several areas there is a strong expectation that being a feminist includes having to work and take part in the so called "do-it-all" culture of balancing work and homelife which additionally creates pressure. On the one hand, the number of dads staying at home and pursuing the traditionally female dominated role of the stay at home parent, the mental load of constantly thinking for all family members remains largely for the mother figure.



Furthermore, despite efforts to promote gender diversity in the workforce, women still face expectations to prove themselves in traditionally male dominated fields such as engineering and technology. Additionally, women in leadership positions may encounter pressure to exhibit collaborative and nurturing leadership styles, reinforcing gendered expectations of leadership behavior (Akchurina, 2013).

In **Turkey**, a complex interplay of modern and traditional values shapes gender stereotypes and expectations for women. Depending on the specific area, religious convictions and cultural norms in varying parts of Turkey gender stereotypes take different forms and extents. While women have made significant strides in education and workforce participation, traditional gender roles still hold sway in many aspects of Turkish society. Women may face pressure to conform to conservative standards of dress and behavior, with societal expectations emphasizing their roles in upholding family honor and reputation. Family honor (namus) and reputation (şeref) hold significant importance and are deeply intertwined with societal expectations regarding gender roles and behavior, including a woman's chastity, modesty, and obedience to familial and societal norms. Women are often viewed as the bearers of family honor, and their behavior is closely monitored to ensure that they do not bring shame or dishonor to their families through non-conforming to strict standards of behavior and morality, particularly in matters related to relationships, marriage, and sexuality (Arat, 20110).

In **Italy**, gender stereotypes play a significant role in shaping societal attitudes and expectations towards women, influencing various aspects of their lives from career opportunities to relationships and self-image. Equally like in the rest of Europe, traditional gender roles dictate that women prioritize family responsibilities over career advancement. This often translates into limited career opportunities for women, as societal expectations place a greater emphasis on women's roles as caregivers and homemakers.



Consequently, women may find themselves relegated to lower-paying and less prestigious roles in the workforce compared to their male counterparts, perpetuating gender disparities in professional settings. Secondly, Italian culture places a strong emphasis on physical appearance and beauty, particularly for women. Women are expected to conform to traditional beauty standards that prioritize attributes such as youthfulness, slimness, and conventional attractiveness. Italian media often perpetuates gender stereotypes through portrayals of women that emphasize their physical appearance and sexuality. Women are frequently depicted in roles that reinforce traditional gender norms, such as the passive and submissive housewife or the seductive femme fatale. This objectification of women in the media can contribute to the normalization of gender inequality and discrimination in society (Ostuni, 2022)

Combating Gender Stereotypes

Combating gender stereotypes was started by a few activists in the 19th century and nowadays countries like Spain elect ministers of equality. Still, reaching the goal of equality is a long way ahead. While much changed in the field of gender equality over the last 150 years we are not nearly at a place of complete equality. Nearly half of Europe's citizens believe that women's most important task is to take care of their house and family. Simultaneously, only 8% of Chairpeople in companies active in the stock market are women (End Gender Stereotypes). So how can we successfully fight against common gender norms? While it is important to keep in mind what exactly are the different, specific gender norms we are facing, it is also crucial to think about tactics of persuasion that can help communicate a more open and judgment free mindset towards all genders.



Combating gender stereotypes is an important step towards achieving equality and empowerment for people, regardless of gender. Education plays a key role in these efforts. Comprehensive educational programs are needed to raise awareness of gender stereotypes from an early age on. That way, children avoid building those stereotypes from the beginning and better, more functional thinking patterns of gender can be established. These programs should foster critical thinking and discussion about gender roles, identity, and diversity, and provide people with the tools to effectively challenge stereotypes they might recognize in others or themselves.

In addition to education, media representations also play an important role in shaping ideas about gender. It is essential to promote diverse and accurate representation of gender in the media. This includes promoting representation in advertising, television, film, literature and online content. Media literacy programs are also important in helping people critically analyze and challenge stereotypes that are perpetuated in the media environment.

Another important aspect of combating stereotypes is gender-neutral language and policies. Encouraging the adoption of gender-neutral language and policies in various areas of society helps create an environment where everyone feels valued and respected. Despite creating a more inclusive environment it also has the effect that the way we speak changes the way we think and therefore hinders the continuous development of gender stereotypes within ourselves and others listening to us (Boroditsky, 2011).

Promoting diversity and inclusion is an essential part of challenging traditional gender norms. Creating an inclusive environment that values diversity and challenges stereotypes helps build a more just society. Encouraging participation in activities and occupations traditionally associated with the opposite sex further promotes inclusion and removes barriers.



Empowerment through role models is also essential. By highlighting and celebrating people who challenge gender stereotypes and are positive role models, we empower others to reach their full potential, regardless of society's expectations. Addressing implicit bias is essential to effectively combating gender stereotypes.

Providing training and resources to help people recognize and address hidden gender biases fosters self-reflection and dialogue, which in turn fosters more inclusive attitudes and behaviors. It is essential to enact and enforce laws and policies that prohibit gender discrimination and promote gender equality. Access to resources and support services for people experiencing gender-based discrimination and harassment is essential to building safe and just societies.

Psychological Effects in Combating Gender Stereotypes

Next to educational approaches there are a variety of psychological effects and biases playing a role in the combating of gender stereotypes. Put into other words, fighting gender stereotypes means changing hurtful thought patterns implemented in us through a society that actively lives these stereotypes.

- **Confirmation Bias:** This bias involves processing information in a way that confirms pre-existing beliefs or hypotheses. When growing up with stereotypical beliefs and mindset towards gender and expectations associated with it, the brain seeks to find information that goes hand in hand with these thoughts. When presented with imagery or information that aligns with their beliefs, individuals may be more likely to accept it. When combating gender stereotypes, it might be beneficial to introduce new input in a way that connects preexisting beliefs with new ideas and attitudes so the receiving person is more likely to keep an open mindset (Wason, 2017)



- **Illusory Truth Effect:** This effect refers to the tendency for people to believe that statements or claims are true simply because they have been exposed to them repeatedly. The brain compares new input with preexisting knowledge and experiences. When finding coherent information there is no cognitive dissonance which enables a deeper processing of information. When images or visual representations are repeatedly presented, individuals are more inclined to accept them as true, even if they lack evidence or are misleading (Wang, 2016)
- **Mere Exposure Effect:** The mere exposure effect describes the effect that input that has been experienced several times is not only rather believed as true but also generally preferred towards input that is new. This principle is widely used in advertisements (Van Dessel, 2017)
- **Availability Heuristic:** This heuristic involves making judgments based on the ease with which examples or instances come to mind. When vivid or emotionally charged imagery is readily available in memory, individuals may overestimate the likelihood or importance of related events or phenomena. Equally, preexisting knowledge that has been activated through memories or outside input is easier to access for the brain and thus generally preferred (Meng, 2017)
- **Anchoring Bias:** This bias occurs when individuals rely too heavily on initial information (the "anchor") when making decisions or judgments. A first input determines how future input is evaluated by serving as the main comparison points to all other inputs. Talking about gender stereotypes, the first presentation on someone breaking gender stereotypes might lead to this specific scenario serving as an anchor point where all future action against gender stereotypes is judged in heaviness, impact and effect according to this specific scene. Imagery can serve as a powerful anchor, shaping perceptions and influencing subsequent judgments and beliefs (Bunn, 1975)



- **Visual Priming:** Priming refers to the activation of certain thoughts or associations in memory by exposure to related stimuli. Visual priming occurs when exposure to specific images influences subsequent thoughts, feelings, or behaviors in a related context. Basically, if people are presented with images showing stereotypical gender representation they are more likely to act according to stereotypes of their own gender. However, this also works the other way around. Being presented imagery showing people acting against gender stereotypes might enable behaviors that are independent from gender stereotypes (Gauthir, 2000).
- **Emotional Manipulation:** Imagery can evoke powerful emotional responses, which may in turn influence individuals' beliefs and behaviors. Showing pictures of overwhelming male dominance in the workplace or an infuriating lack of respect towards women might evoke anger and change opinions and attitudes. It is also possible to create joy and motivation when seeing positive images of women acting in an independent and forceful way. Emotional manipulation tactics, such as using emotionally charged imagery to evoke fear or sympathy, can be used to sway opinions and convictions. It is absolutely crucial to use these measurements with careful consideration, being aware of the effect they can have and informing people of the possible effects of exposure to said mechanism (DeSteno, 2014).

Finally, achieving meaningful progress requires a collaborative effort. By fostering partnerships between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, businesses and community groups, it is possible to use psychological principles in order to create a lasting impact. Coordinated efforts can be more effective and create momentum towards achieving gender equality.



Psychological Effects in Combating Gender Stereotypes

As mentioned above, art can be used in various ways to communicate with its observer. It can be a methodology of nonverbal communication to criticize, inform, share a new perspective, applaud a person or event or characterize an object. Artists like Goya, Bansky or Van Gogh have used it for decades to demand social change. So how can we use photography to successfully implement a more open minded and judgment free mindset in its viewers?

The first aspect is representation and visibility. Through photography, diverse identities and life forms can be represented that are usually not represented in mainstream media. Representation can have the effect of creating a more inclusive understanding of humanity.

Then, a playful and experimental use of stereotypical depiction in ironic, humorous or absurd ways can make them feel less serious. This encourages viewers to question their own viewpoints.

To continue, Art might encourage critical reflection on social issues, including stereotypes and prejudices. By provoking thought and sparking dialogue, artworks prompt viewers to confront their own biases and consider alternative perspectives.

Moreover, marginalized communities can express themselves through art which can have an effect of empowerment. By reclaiming narratives and challenging stereotypes through their creative work, individuals assert their agency and demand recognition.

Also, art can serve as a catalyst for social change and activism by mobilizing communities around shared values and goals. Through collective action and advocacy efforts, artists and activists work together to promote equity and justice.



Finally, art has the ability to evoke empathy by inviting viewers to see the world through the eyes of others. By depicting the experiences and emotions of individuals from diverse backgrounds, artists can foster understanding and compassion.

Empathy and its role in Communication

Empathy is a fundamental aspect of human interaction, enabling individuals to recognize, understand, and share the emotions, thoughts, and experiences of others. It involves the ability to see the world from someone else's perspective and connect with their feelings on an emotional level. Empathy plays a crucial role in fostering meaningful connections. It strongly enhances interpersonal connection through a mutual understanding of the opposite's situation. Empathy encompasses both cognitive empathy, the ability to understand another person's thoughts and feelings, and emotional empathy, the capacity to share in another person's emotions. Therefore empathy can largely be described as what colloquially is referred to as emotional intelligence. Empathy is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that involves neurological, psychological, and social processes.

Empathy serves as the baseline of effective communication, offering diverse benefits that enrich interpersonal interactions and foster positive relationships. Empathy is instrumental in building trust and rapport in interpersonal relationships. When individuals feel genuinely understood and valued, they are more likely to feel comfortable and open up during conversations, leading to the cultivation of positive connections over time. This sense of trust creates a supportive environment where individuals feel seen.



Empathy is closely connected to active listening and participation, a crucial component of effective communication. Through empathetic approaches, individuals focus on understanding the speaker's emotions, concerns, and underlying messages without judgment or interruption. In addition, empathy plays a role in conflict resolution by encouraging individuals to empathize with the perspectives and feelings of other parties involved. This is extremely relevant in personal conflicts but can also be a leading factor in societal issues, especially when it comes to integration, equality and diversity. By de-escalating tensions and building mutual understanding, empathetic communicators can work towards finding constructive solutions that benefit all parties involved.

Cultivating empathy enhances overall communication skills, including verbal and nonverbal communication. Empathetic communicators are adept at conveying their own thoughts and feelings clearly while also acknowledging and validating the perspectives of others. Thereby encouraging an empathic approach to social change can be extremely effective (Riess, 2017).

How does Empathy work?

Mirror neurons play a central role in empathic reaction in the brain. They are a specialized type of brain cell that fire both when an individual performs an action and when they observe someone else performing the same action. These neurons allow individuals to mirror the emotions and experiences of others. When we witness someone experiencing an emotion such as anger or pride, mirror neurons fire in our brain, creating a shared emotional experience and facilitating empathy. This is why we can experience a feeling of pride when witnessing an accomplishment of someone close to us. Besides mirror neurons, the brain's empathy network consists of several interconnected regions that are involved in processing emotional information. The anterior insula is important for experiencing and recognizing emotions, while the anterior cingulate cortex is involved in regulating emotional responses and empathy. The medial prefrontal cortex plays a role in understanding the mental states and intentions of others, known as theory of mind.



Empathy also involves the ability to take the perspective of others and understand their thoughts, feelings, and motivations. This process relies on brain regions involved in cognitive empathy, such as the temporoparietal junction and the superior temporal sulcus. These regions help individuals interpret social cues, understand social norms, and infer the mental states of others which allows for accurate perspective-taking and empathic understanding in communication.

After understanding an opposite's emotions, empathy also requires the ability to regulate one's own emotions in response. The prefrontal cortex, particularly the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, is involved in emotional regulation and impulse control. That helps individuals manage their own emotional responses and maintain empathy in challenging or emotionally charged situations, enabling effective communication by promoting calm and rational responses. This leads to the ability of empathetic listening. In communication, empathy manifests through empathetic listening, a process that involves fully engaging with and understanding the emotions and perspectives of others. Empathetic listening activates brain regions involved in attention, such as the superior temporal gyrus and the parietal cortex, allowing individuals to focus on the speaker's verbal and nonverbal cues. This active engagement facilitates understanding during communication, fostering meaningful connections and mutual understanding (Mason, 2014).



Fighting Gender Stereotypes through Photography: Evoking Empathy

When it comes to specific techniques of how to fight gender stereotypes through photography, empathy can be a powerful emotion to help enable a more comprehensive approach to think about gender. Considering methods of communication and persuasion mentioned above there are several starting points on how to share photography in an exhibition that might have the biggest possible impact on viewers.

It is important to consider that members of different countries and backgrounds might focus on different aspects of gender inequality. As the objectification of women might be specifically remarkable in Italy a visitor from Italy might be more attentive towards pictures that frame women in an environment where her appearance has no importance. Simultaneously a German visitor could be more inclined to be attentive towards a photograph depicting a woman that doesn't have to balance profession and carework at the same time. Exhibitions can either adapt to certain target groups or show pictures tackling different areas of gender equality in order to reach the most people.

Motives, composition of the picture, introductory texts or presentations, order of pictures etc. can have a remarkable effect on the empathy viewers feel towards the issue of gender inequality, independent from their national background. There are several techniques and methods that can facilitate the communication of a message of equality:

- Employing an educative, informative approach accompanying exhibitions with concrete and detailed educative content that offers the chance to not only experience artwork but lets visitors contextualize the photographs in a framework of background knowledge and understanding their purpose can increase their impact.



Especially if information shared is new and lacks comparable prior knowledge of visitors, these pieces of information can act as anchoring biases for all future input related to the topic. When sharing the fact that currently only eight percent of chairpeople of Europe's biggest companies are women before seeing artwork connected to gender inequality one enables a deeper processing of information. Therefore visitors might be more inclined to relate to the topic and understand the pictures presented in the framework of inequality and need to work towards changing it.

- While sharing new information, through text or photography, can lead to an anchoring bias effect, the information should not contradict prior convictions. The confirmation bias can lead to increased openness and interest in a topic. In fighting gender stereotypes through photography, showing motives or scenes known or relatable to viewers can avoid effects of cognitive dissonance and hence improve the exhibition's impact.
- Repeatedly showing similar motives or using coherent lightings, making photographs similar can have the beneficial effects of illusory truth and mere exposure. Visitors will not only be more likely to believe what they see to be true but simultaneously like it more. In fighting gender stereotypes it could for instance make sense to repeatedly show positive role models in various scenarios. The role model effect and the effects of illusory truth and mere exposure should complement each other and lead to an increased impact.
- Gender neutral language surrounding all artwork and the setting of the exhibition can change the way people think about gender roles and hopefully motivates visitors to adopt this approach in their daily-lives.
- When motives of photographs are relatable to visitors because they know them from their own lives or have recently heard about them information can be retrieved easier. This is due to the availability heuristic. In artistic exhibitions this can be used in the setting of the exhibition, when relatability increases empathy and a more open mindset and after the exhibition. By presenting various topics in the form of pictures they become more present, available, in visitor's brains who in consequence should be more self-reflective about the topic.



- Visual priming and emotional manipulation are both relevant aspects when it comes to showing photographs in order to fight something. Showing emotional scenes that appeal to visitors directly, preferably of people acting independent from gender stereotypes can prime visitors into adopting a more independent mindset themselves. Through the activation of emotions visitors process information deeper and the learning effect increases. Emotions in photography can be transported through various elements, particularly lighting, color pallets and composition. This can be connected with a generally inclusive environment such as reframing from traditional gender roles in exhibition staff, using gender neutral bathrooms or using a gender neutral language.

All in all, in exhibitions, employing an educative and informative approach alongside relatable content and inclusive settings fosters empathy among visitors. They can better relate to subjects of artwork and understand the perspective of the subject's portrayed. By providing context and impactful information before presenting artwork, visitors are encouraged to deeply engage with the exhibited pieces, relating them to societal issues and promoting understanding that goes beyond the framework of the exhibition. Repeatedly showcasing positive role models and relatable scenes reinforces empathy, while ensuring that information aligns with visitors' existing beliefs encourages openness and interest in the topic. Additionally, visual priming and emotional manipulation through photography evoke empathy by engaging visitors' emotions and deepening their understanding. Thus, creating a supportive and inclusive environment encourages visitors to empathize with the experiences depicted in the artwork, leading to a deeper connection and greater impact.



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