

# Women's Rights and Equality in Arts Education

—  
Embedding Women's Rights & Equality Perspective  
into Arts Education Methods to work with people  
from diverse (cultural) backgrounds

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# Module Plan

## General Objective

Understanding Women's Rights Perspective and Intercultural Competence in Art Education

## Specific Objective

- Investigating ways to include women's rights perspective in a teamwork and challenge gender stereotypes
- Finding strategies to respond to the needs of (women) learners coming from different socio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds
- Creating a framework about how to combine women's rights framework with the needs of culturally, ethnically, linguistically and religiously responsive teaching methodology

## Abilities to be Developed

At the end of this module, the trainees will:

- Learn different ways to deal with specific target groups, e.g. migrant/refugee women.
- Be able to embed women's rights perspective into their teaching methodology.
- Be able to understand and respond to specific needs of their target groups (migrant/refugee women).

## Audience

The audience of your module will be adult learners, opera educators, arts educators, cultural mediators, and artists.

## Duration

2 hours.

## Schedule

5 MINUTES	Introduction
10 MINUTES	Warm up exercise
25 MINUTES	Main concepts

15 MINUTES	Women's rights and feminism perspective in art education
20 MINUTES	Consent and Boundaries
10 MINUTES	Exercise: The Power Matrix and Positioning of the Nude Body
15 MINUTES	Responding to Specific Needs of Migrant / Refugee Women
5 MINUTES	Conclusion
10 MINUTES	Assessment

## Required Materials

Materials necessary to present the module: whiteboard, projector, papers, pens, etc.

# Training Session

# 1. Introduction

This training module has been developed to **strengthen** the knowledge and skills of **art educators** so that they can embed **women's rights** perspective into their teaching methodology. This module is designed first of all to take participants through basic concepts related to **women's rights** and **feminism**. Through exploring gender stereotypes, it also aims to analyse how gender roles and expectations are socially constructed, not biologically determined. The module then examines how gender stereotypes intersect with other factors such as age, ethnicity, race, class, culture, religion. Following this, a series of exercises will help participants to understand the importance of these main concepts. The module concludes with an analysis of the importance of embedding **feminist** and **women's rights** perspective methods in art education with **migrant/refugee** groups and wider social benefits that can be derived from it. The module also aims to tease out the problems that might arise in case of lacking women's rights-based approach in art education.

## 2. Warm Up Exercise: Are you a feminist?

This short introductory activity is an introspective exercise that will make the trainers reflect, at a personal level, on their relationship with feminism, equality between women and men, and the patriarchal structures of power within which we often find ourselves without consciously realising it.

## 3. Terms & Definitions: Intersection of sex, gender stereotypes, race/ethnicity/class/religion

The aim of this first section is to help participants clarify the main terms and definitions, developed by the women's rights scholars and activists, underpinning the universal historic struggle for women's rights. Particular attention is paid to understanding of distinction between gender and sex; the masculinity and femininity constructs; how society has developed different gender-related roles for men and women; how these roles are reinforced through stereotypes, use of language and images; and the impact of strict and persistent gender roles on women's rights and society as a whole.

**THE AIM OF THIS TRAINING MODULE IS TO PROVIDE ART EDUCATORS WITH A SUSTAINABLE WAY TO EMBED WOMEN'S RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE INTO THEIR ACTIVITIES**

### 3.1. Main concepts (handout)

Core concepts provide an overview of interrelated terms.

#### **Patriarchy**

Social system in which males hold primary power and dominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and ownership of property and resources and exercise control and dominance over women.

#### **Sex**

Refers to biological characteristics, determined at conception of human, of female and male (as well as > 0% of intersex people)

#### **Sexism**

Ideology that justifies and supports discriminatory patriarchal social relations derived from distinctions between the sexes

#### **Misogyny**

Social systems or environments where women face hostility and hatred because they're women in a historical patriarchy. Misogyny rewards women who reinforce the patriarchal status quo and punishes those who don't. Sexism is the ideology that supports patriarchal social relations, but misogyny enforces it when there's a threat of that system going away.

#### **Gender, also known as sex roles**

Refers to socially constructed roles and learnt behaviours of men and women, boys and girls, the way we are perceived and expected to think and act as women and men because of the way society is organised. **Gender roles are fundamentally linked with the power relationship between women and men** (hence, societies with less strict gender roles exhibit lesser rates of Violence against Women). They also change over time and according to varied **social, economic, political and cultural factors**, as well throughout **history**.

## Gender Stereotypes

People are socialised to take on masculine or feminine gender roles from childhood. The **choices** made by **parents and educators** define these gender roles and it affects every aspect of our lives including our behaviours and perceptions. According to these stereotypes, **femininity** is more related to domestic sphere (cooking, caring, cleaning), being emotional and weak, while **masculinity** is mostly associated with leadership, strength and being less emotional. Gender stereotypes lie at the root of discrimination against women and a lot of forms of Violence against Women (e.g. Female Genital Mutilation, Forced Marriage, Honour based Violence)

Once internalised, gender stereotypes produce gender biases in our behaviour. These include hidden or open gender biases in educators' teaching practices.



Young boy in pink,  
American school of painting (1840)

## Equality between women and men

Refers the equal rights, opportunities and access to resources, afforded to women and men, in law and in practice, and the removal of discriminatory actions and structural inequalities on the basis of one's sex. Promoting equality between women and men often required differentiated approach to women and men on the basis of recognition of their different needs (e.g. in sexual-reproductive health).

## Women's Rights / Feminist Perspective

Analytical Framework that examines every phenomenon by asking a question.

## 3.2. "How does it impact women?"

### Intersectionality

Method of analysis of inequalities originally derived from the case of legal discrimination of black women in the USA, who faced exclusion from the labour force both on the grounds of their sex and race.

In the case of migrant populations, when sex intersect with race, ethnicity, class and/or religion, it can create multiple disadvantages, especially for women. This approach is important in understanding specific problems and needs of migrant and refugee women.

## **Male Gaze**

Term coined by feminist filmmaker Laura Mulvey, refers to the sexual politics of the gaze and a sexualised way of looking that empowers men and objectifies women. In the male gaze, woman is visually positioned as an “object” of (hetero)sexual male desire. Her feelings, thoughts and her own sexual desire are less important than her being “framed” by male desire. “Male gaze” can be enacted by men towards women, women towards other women, as well as towards themselves.

## **(Post-/Neo-) Colonial Imagination/Gaze**

First referred to by Edward Said as “orientalism”, the term is used to explain the relationship that colonial powers extended to people of colonized countries with the the function of establishing the subject/object relationship. This colonizer/colonized relationship often became the basis for the colonized understanding of themselves and their identity. In case of a female ‘art object’, combined with the “male gaze”, it creates a differential, sexualized, passive and equally subservient “female other”.

## Hand-Out: Extra vertebrae in Ingres' La Grande Odalisque



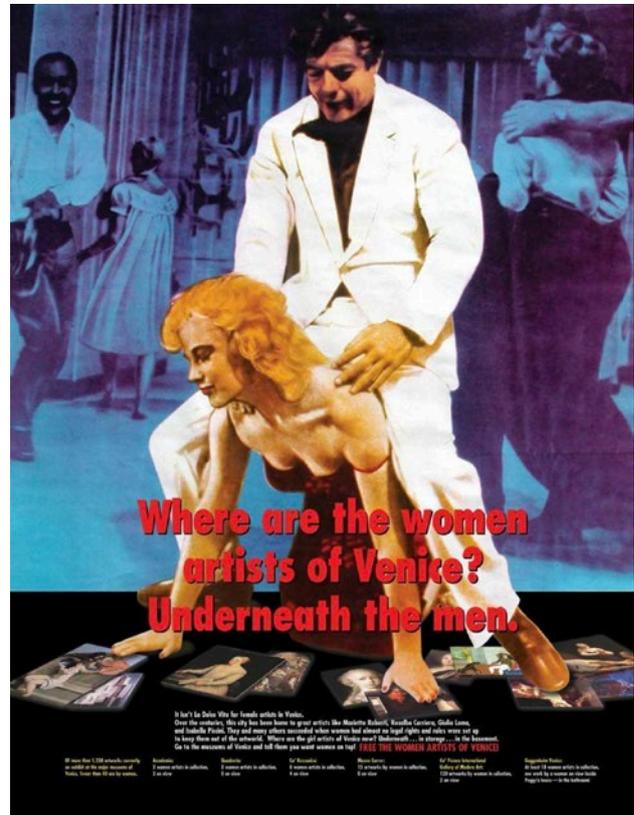
“The deformation was found to be greater than originally assumed (five, rather than three, extra lumbar vertebrae), and to involve both the back and the pelvis. Ingres’ paintings skilfully combine realism and symbolism. We suggest that the deformation may have been introduced for psychological reasons. By placing the harem woman’s head further away from her pelvis the artist may have been marking the gulf between her thoughts (expressed by her aloof, resigned look) and her social role (symbolized by her deliberately lengthened pelvis)”.



## 4. Women's rights and feminism perspective in Art Education

Historically, **art has been a male-dominated field**, and women artists were invisible to the public eye and neglected as artists. The representation of women in the classical performing arts has also been problematic from a feminist perspective. For example, famous operas like Carmen, Madame Butterfly, Tosca represent women dying due to their "immoralities". Some other art pieces stage rape scenes or violence and might normalize violence against women. The way women are depicted shows how women are viewed, therefore, the role of arts and creativity in breaking down these stereotypes and achieving equality should be highlighted. Art, in all its forms, is one of the most powerful tools in transmitting the message of feminist perspective and introducing the world to women's point of view about their bodies and personal experiences.

Therefore, when designing teaching materials it is always important to pay attention to not reproducing gender biases against female artists and women in general.



Guerrilla Girls Poster



**Beyond Europe: Stories of Women's Struggle & Empowerment from around the World through the Arts**

# 5. Cultural Relativism vs Cultural Sensitivity

## Cultural Relativism

**Human rights are inherent to all human beings** irrespective of their sex, religion, ethnicity and culture. However, universal and fundamental human rights are often challenged and infringed on by patriarchal practices, presented as “culture” and “traditions”. Related to this, cultural relativism reject some aspects of universal human/women rights and supports subjectivity of moral actions depending on cultures in different societies, thus, justifying discrimination against women and minorities.

Examples of human rights violations commonly justified by “culture/tradition”:

- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
- Forced and Arranged Marriages
- Enforced Sex Segregation
- Persecution of Sexual minorities
- Deprivation of Girls of Rights to Education
- Sex discrimination in inheritance and property ownership

Therefore, it is of enormous importance to **acknowledge the universality of human/women rights** standards to fight against the challenges to women’s rights in every field, including art.

Rejecting cultural relativism does not mean that culture or cultural/religious group rights are unimportant. **Universal Declaration of Human Rights and European Charter of Human Rights** both protect people’s rights to participate in the cultural life of the community and share its benefits. Recognition and respect for every culture has also been stated. The problem arises when human/women rights are confronted with and/or become overridden by these cultural and religious group rights. However, violating or allowing violation of women’s rights due to cultural norms is unacceptable.

That is why cultural relativism approach should not be confused with (inter)cultural sensitivity and cultural diversity.

## Cultural Diversity

Refers to the co-existence of a difference in language, lifestyle, religion, ethnicity, traditions and also artistic expressions. It highlights the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups. The reality of **cultural diversity** can only be achieved with cultural pluralism which symbolizes the interaction between people and groups with plural and dynamic cultural identities.

## **Intercultural Sensitivity**

Refers firstly to recognising cultural differences in society and maximising mutual communication between different groups and build trust. Culture shapes people's actions and behaviours, misinterpretation of these different behaviours might create misunderstandings and conflicts Intercultural sensitivity requires knowledge and skills to build relationships and communicate effectively across cultures. However, when cultural differences clash with fundamental human rights, cultural sensitivity should be revisited.

**“THE REALITY OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED WITH CULTURAL PLURALISM WHICH SYMBOLIZES THE INTERACTION BETWEEN PEOPLE AND GROUPS WITH PLURAL AND DYNAMIC CULTURAL IDENTITIES”.**

**“INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY REQUIRES KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY ACROSS CULTURES”.**

## 6. Consent and Boundaries

### 6.1. Informed Consent

**Educators** working with **ALL women learners**, including migrant, refugee and ethnic minority women, should base their methodology on the solid understanding of informed consent.

Consent is defined as **cooperation in act and attitude, exercise of free will and knowledge of what is happening**. Having consent to one specific thing does not mean that women learners give consent to everything. There should always be respect for physical and mental boundaries of learners.

Rather than becoming a stylised ritual, informed consent should be a dialogic process continuing throughout teaching. Engagement on the human level, understanding personal stories/problems of learners and giving them space to explain their specific needs should be prioritised.

Specific boundaries of individuals should be acknowledged at the beginning of an activity. The **educator** has a responsibility to **inform learners** of what an art workshop will involve before they choose to participate. Having a ground for respect and trust will help women learners to feel more comfortable in practising activities.

**Educators** should be aware that women cannot be pushed into anything for the sake of artistic concerns.

There must be **certain rules**: women must agree, be ready, be confident to be involved in artistic activities. Women should always have the right to say 'no'. Activities should be organized based on the agency and consent of women. Women and girls should feel physically and emotionally safe. Inflexible rules and regulations regarding dress or type of physical activities may overlook the needs of their learners.

### 6.2. Mixed sex vs single sex groups of learners

Linked to the notion of consent and boundaries is the understanding of differences between mixed- and single-sex spaces/activities/groups. This is particularly important if **educators**

want to successfully engage with the women from marginalised communities, vulnerable situations or/or those who have been subjected to high levels of violence. It also includes the women who originate from communities with enforced sex segregation, where physical proximity and contact between women and men may be sanctioned.



Depending on the activity and its content, it is always important to **consider** whether it will be most beneficial to conduct it in mixed- or single-sex group.

Examples of content that women (including migrant women) may feel uncomfortable / refuse to engage in / feel threatened or (re)traumatised, in mixed sex spaces:

- Stories/images that depict violence, particularly, male sexual violence against women
- Stories/images that explicitly deal with (hetero- and homo-) sexuality, sexual relationships and experiences
- Discussions of cultural, ethnic and religious practices, traditions and rituals that justify discrimination against women (e.g. forced and arranged marriages, denial of abortion )
- Exercises and activities that incorporate the elements of personal experience, story-telling and testimonies

**“EDUCATORS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT WOMEN CANNOT BE PUSHED INTO ANYTHING FOR THE SAKE OF ARTISTIC CONCERNS”.**

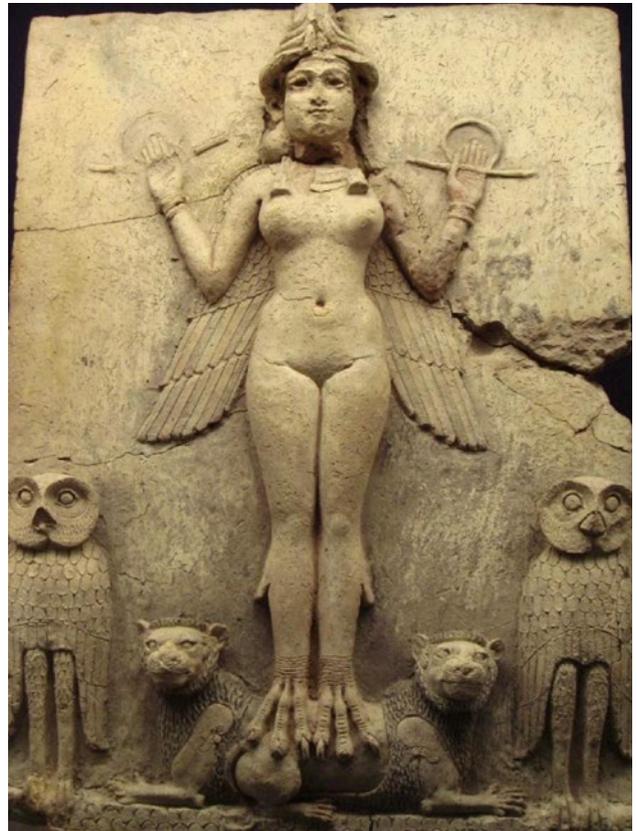
## 6.3. Role of Same Sex educators

The considerations applied to single- vs mixed-sex activities should be extended to the role and position of cultural educators. For some activities/materials delivered to women only groups, it is important that they are conducted by the same-sex educator as to ensure maximum level of comfort and participation of learners.

## 6.4. Nudity in Art

Nudity, in many ways integral to the artistic tradition, can be a challenging aspect of art education when working with diverse ethnic backgrounds.

From the women's rights perspective, in order to decide the "appropriateness" of such content, it should firstly be analysed within the Feminist Power Matrix.



Ishtar, Mesopotamian goddess, 1800 BC

## Power Matrix: Hand-Out

Additionally, art educators should be sensitive to the personal needs and interests of learners i.e. their age, culture, religion, comfort level and personal stories (of migration). In the case of women who have been subjected to violence additional consideration should be given as to avoid secondary/re-traumatisation / victimisation.

Methodology-wise, educators should provide guidance about how to approach and engage with such topics in a responsive way.

### Exercise: The Power Matrix and Positioning of the Nude Body

Nudity, in many ways integral to the artistic tradition, can be a challenging aspect of art education when working with diverse ethnic backgrounds. From the women's rights perspective, in order to decide the "appropriateness" of such content, it should firstly be analysed within the Feminist Power Matrix.

Explanation to the Power Matrix:

The Matrix is divided into two spheres and Each sphere is further divided into three Categories of Power\*:

#### 1. Material



#### 2. Symbolic



\*Category of Power does not mean literally "power". Rather it means a contextual element that gives us access to or minimises our position of power.

The Example Matrix contains six images positioned randomly under each category. This example will be used by a Trainer to explain how the images containing nudity, and, in particular, nude female body, can be analysed in relation to each power category.

E.g.

**Image in the Category Audience:** for whom was this image produced? Who do we imagine looking at this image? Consuming this image? Who is the target audience?

**Image in the Category Purpose:** What is the intended purpose of this nude/semi-nude body? What kind of message this image tries to convey?

**Image in the Category Agency:** Does this image transmit the Agency of the nude body? Or is this body in the position of submission and lack of agency?

**Image in the Category Resources:** What kind of resources were utilised in creating this image ? (by this we don't mean simply clothing or paints). By resources we mean the material context in which the image was created (e.g. situation of poverty or material stability, as well as, for example, access to education)

**Image in the Category Knowledge:** This category is closely related to Purpose. It is a symbolic sphere in which we can ask, Does the creator of this image aware of its impact ? Can this image have an a harmful impact, even if unintended ? Is the purpose represented in this image in the position to make an informed choice ?

**Image in the Category Desire:** This category is linked to the area of sexuality and sexual politics. The questions we can ask in relation to "desire" vis-a-vis a nude body: Whose desire it represents, if any? Does it invoke an erotic desire? Is it intended to invoke such desire ? Is this desire socially and culturally constructed?

After an explanation of images in relation to different categories, Trainees are given an image each, to position and analyse them in different Categories of Power. This 360 degree analysis of an image should help us establish whether a specific image is appropriate for specific category and whether there are potential harmful consequences in using such an image in a workshop.



[\*\*Click here to see the Power Matrix Tool\*\*](#)

**“THIS 360 DEGREE ANALYSIS OF AN IMAGE SHOULD HELP US ESTABLISH WHETHER A SPECIFIC IMAGE IS APPROPRIATE FOR SPECIFIC CATEGORY AND WHETHER THERE ARE POTENTIAL HARMFUL CONSEQUENCES IN USING SUCH AN IMAGE IN A WORKSHOP.”**

## 7. Responding to Specific Needs of Migrant/ Refugee Women and Girls

Teaching methodology should always be based on a framework which **considers** specific needs and personal experiences of **learners**, and, in the case of migrant, refugee and ethnic minority women and girls, those vary depending on multiple and overlapping factors. Among them are:

- Age
- Ethnicity & Community of Origin
- Economic status
- Legal status (right to work, legal dependency on spouse)
- Family Status (single, divorced, with/out children)
- Sexual Orientation
- Religious practice (or absence of such)
- Migratory experience
- Experience and/or history of violence



"There Is A Light That Never Goes Out.",  
Faviana Rodriguez, Latina Artist

Considering **different phases of migration** (pre-, during and post-migration) women are put into more vulnerable situations i.e. different forms of violence, sexual exploitation, assault, trafficking. They witness war and lose their loved ones. Pre-existing traumas may multiply with pending legal status and legal and economic dependence on partners and affect migrant/refugee women's well-being and thereby their integration to the host society.

As a general rule for (art) educators, they need to allocate sufficient time to study and understand each individual student profile and background. This information should be collected and made available to the professionals designing and delivering art trainings, in order for them to be in the position to meet students' needs.

### **Trauma and Re-/Secondary Traumatization/Victimisation**

**Art** can be a powerful tool for **healing and overcoming traumatic experience**. It can also be inadvertently triggering and emotionally unsettling. Artistic exercises, especially

the ones involving active participation, might provide tools to address wellbeing of migrants and refugees. **Art** can also be utilised as a **trauma therapy**. However, art practitioners and educators should be aware of the challenging history and continuing difficulties migrant/refugee women cope with. Then they can formalise a space where women/girls feel comfortable and enjoy the freedom to express themselves without the fear of judgement, away from stress and trauma.

In this process students should always be given the right and opportunity to **express** their concerns, as well as the right to **withdraw** or **take a break from an activity**. To ensure that such break or withdrawal is possible the space in which an activity takes place should be designed accordingly (e.g. with an extra room or a terrace where a student can take a break, have space on her own and/or wait until the activity is over).

**“AS A GENERAL RULE FOR (ART) EDUCATORS, THEY NEED TO ALLOCATE SUFFICIENT TIME TO STUDY AND UNDERSTAND EACH INDIVIDUAL STUDENT PROFILE AND BACKGROUND.”**

# Resources



**[The curse of Nakedness](#)**



**[Feminism was not invented by western women, Nawal el Saadawi](#)**



**[Extra vertebrae in Ingres' La Grande Odalisque](#)**

# Activities + Tools

## **WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND EQUALITY IN ARTS EDUCATION**

The aim of this first section is to help participants clarify the main terms and definitions, developed by the women's rights scholars and activists, underpinning the universal historic struggle for women's rights.

### **HOW TO USE IT?**

Useful to understand terms and definition.



**DOWNLOAD TOOL**

## **WORLWIDE WOMEN ARTISTS**

Important figures, stories and challenges of being women artists.

### **HOW TO USE IT?**

Useful to understand terms and definition.



**DOWNLOAD TOOL**

# POWER MATRIX

Power matrix represents a symbolic mapping of power relations underpinning visual and artistic representations, from the perspective of women and minorities rights.

## HOW TO USE IT?

The Matrix is divided into two spheres:

1. Material; 2. Symbolic.

Each sphere is further divided into three Categories of Power\*:

- Material - Purpose, Resources, Audience;
- Symbolic - Agency, Knowledge, Desire.

The Example Matrix contains six images positioned randomly under each category. This example will be used by a Trainer to explain how the images containing nudity, and, in particular, nude female body, can be analysed in relation to each power category.



**DOWNLOAD TOOL**



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