

## Gender, Covid and Governance. Women in decision making.

### Educational Material

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT

Feminists critics have pointed out to the negative consequences of excluding women from decision making positions in policy making about COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> Although women are the ones that are mostly affected by gender-based violence during COVID-19 lock downs and the vast majority of healthcare workers are women, only 25% of global leaders are female.<sup>2</sup> The absence of gender balanced decision-making bodies at a global level is likely to affect how gender issues are included or marginalised in policy agendas. The exclusion or marginalisation of women from relevant decision-making committees is usually legitimised during crises, such as the lock-down, by arguments that stress the urgency of policy measures and requirements for high level expertise. However, lack of consideration for gender balance in decision making may also have adverse longer-term impacts as institutional practices become consolidated. In post-coronavirus societies, the state of emergency is likely to continue for health or financial reasons pushing for further marginalisation of gender issues, including gender-based violence, work-life balance and healthcare professions.

Why is governance interesting and important in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic and Gender relations?

- The pandemic increased the power of the government to impose behavioural rules on population
- The pandemic increased the power of natural scientists, their public visibility and influence in decision making processes in governments
- Governments based their decision making on the epidemiologists/experts
- The pandemic increased the power and profits of pharma companies and their influence on governments
- Health institution are becoming more central in the society during the pandemic. Women make up 70% of health personnel but only 25% of

1 Blaskó et al (2020)

2 World Economic Forum (2020) "Why we need women's leadership in the COVID-19 response", available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/women-female-leadership-gender-coronavirus-covid19-response/>

leading positions (WHO, October 2021).

Below you will find various activities on Gender, Governance and the Pandemic. You can combine them according to the focus of your lessons, the time available and the interests of you and your students.

The educational material is formulated in a direct way (“Choose one of your identities”) so you can use it directly for addressing your student.

Activity 1 is focussing generally on the understanding of power and its intersectional character. Activities 2-4 then will come to the gendered nature of governance and leadership, especially during the pandemic.

# TARGET AUDIENCE, TYPES OF ACTIVITIES AND OBJECTIVES

## Target Audience:

Undergraduate and postgraduate university students in the social and natural sciences

## Activities:

- Individual & Group activities
- Mapping
- Discussions
- Text analysis
- Reflections
- Visioning Activity

## Objectives:

- Participants will develop a more complex their understanding of gender, power and governance
- Participants will understand the interrelations between personal and collective experiences of
- power
- Participants will reflect on the gendered nature of media coverage of women in power
- Working in groups, participants will reflect in detail on how power operates at distinct levels
- Through practical work in groups, participants articulated positive visions for a gender-sensitive power relations in distinct areas

## **ACTIVITY 1: INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY: MYSELF IN POWER RELATIONS (25-30 MIN)**

**Objectives:** Understanding the structures of power relations starting from the individual

### **Step 1: Introduction to activity (5min)**

Foucault and many others would say that even the idea of the individual, as a separate, self-regulating, autonomous unit is itself a construct of power, one of the discourses that shape how we each think and act within society.

So in this brief activity, we are going to think about the individual as part of a web of social relations, that is, relationships between people, and between people and social structures like institutions, discourses or policies. So the idea here is that each person thinks about the diverse webs of power within which they are located, and the different ways in which their thoughts and actions are shaped or governed.

You will have 5 minutes to make notes or a sketch a simple map. The idea is not to produce a neat or finished thing, but in fact, to note down as many things as you can, and to be as specific as you can. Ideally, it would be great to do it on paper and take a photo – and we would love it if you would send us the photo either to the email/chat if you don't mind sharing it.

### **Step 2: Individual activity (5min)**

Choose one of your subject positions - these are the many roles that society gives us, and through which different institutions, whether public or private, recognise us. It may be about how you occupy your time, as worker or student, or more specifically the fact that you are a social worker, a young mother and so on. Write this subject position (ie female student) in the centre of the sheet.

Think about the different ways in which you are made into that subject position. Specifically, list the names of those institutions, policies, government or corporate bodies, the processes and tasks that have a role in shaping this position for you.

The more the better, you don't need to think deeply about any of this, or make it all clear and logical, just make a mapping.

Here you are not making any comments here on the quality of your relationship with these structures, just trying to think about all the different ones you are part of, or that are part of you.

### Step 3: Discussion (15-20min)

Keep in mind that all subject positions are defined by a variety of power relations. If possible, introduce the concept of intersectionality.

Intersectionality means that social categories such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation or class are not isolated from one another, but must be analysed in their 'interweaving net' or 'crossovers' (intersections). It is considering several social categories, but also of analysing their interactions.

The term intersectionality was introduced by the US legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, who uses the metaphor of a crossroads to describe specific forms of discrimination that have not been adequately captured either legally or politically because they were thought to be either one-dimensional or only additive.

Invite some participants to share the maps to the group and discuss.

Key questions to explore in this moderated discussion:

- What role do these different bodies play in forming your subject position?
- What are the power relations of the different bodies and of yourself?
- What role does gender play in this webs of power relations?
- How did these relations change during the pandemic?
- What different categories define your subject position (gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation or class)?
- Are all categories of your subject position equally relevant in each situation of life and everywhere on the globe? If not, when does a category gain importance?

- What subject positions are most relevant for you? Give an example of how they play a role in your life.
- What other categories are important in your society, or for your subject position that are not mentioned in the power flower?

Share the following quote by bell hooks:

*“Without an ethic of love shaping the direction of our political vision and our radical aspirations, we are often seduced, in one way or the other, into continued allegiance to systems of domination—imperialism, sexism, racism, classism. It has always puzzled me that women and men who spend a lifetime working to resist and oppose one form of domination can be systematically supporting another. I have been puzzled by powerful visionary black male leaders who can speak and act passionately in resistance to racial domination and accept and embrace sexist domination of women, by feminist white women who work daily to eradicate sexism but who have major blind spots when it comes to acknowledging and resisting racism and white supremacist domination of the planet. (...) Fundamentally, if we are only committed to an improvement in that politic of domination that we feel leads directly to our individual exploitation or oppression, we not only remain attached to the status quo but act in complicity with it, nurturing and maintaining those very systems of domination. Until we are all able to accept the interlocking, interdependent nature of systems of domination and recognize specific ways each system is maintained, we will continue to act in ways that undermine our individual quest for freedom and collective liberation struggle.”*

In: bell hooks (1994): Outlaw culture. Resisting Representations. Milton Park: Routledge.

**Ressources:**

Ian Withy-Berry (2021): Achille Mbembe Towards Death: Necropolitics. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gaSASo9H6OE>

Stefano Harney (2018): Governance versus governmentality. URL: <https://www.artandeducation.net/classroom/video/174213/stefano-harney-governance-versus-governmentality>

## **ACTIVITY 2: GROUP ACTIVITY: REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER AND LEADERSHIP DURING THE PANDEMIC (40MIN)**

**Objectives:** Deconstruct the gendered representations of power

### **Step 1: Introduction and Brainstorming (5min)**

In this activity we're going to read some articles about women's leadership during the pandemic. Just to start off, some ideas, what does leadership mean to you all? How is it different from governance? (e.g. leaders play a role in governance)

### **Step 2: Individual reading of one of the three articles (5min)**

Now we are dividing the group into three groups. We will put you in breakout rooms for that. Each of you should first individually read the article, then discuss it in your group.

### **Step 3: Group Work (15min)**

You will have 5 min to read the article and 15min to discuss. Think of these questions as you read. We'll discuss as a whole group afterwards.

- How is leadership gendered in these articles?
- What specific policies or actions are mentioned?
- Why do the authors of the articles think that women are different leaders? What are their logics?
- What implied opposition is there to male leadership? What is male leadership connected to?
- Do you see any problems with these representations?

Group 1: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/05/12/coronavirus-showing-yet-again-why-the-world-needs-more-strong-female-decision-makers-view>

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Group 2: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/avivahwittenbergcox/2020/04/13/what-do-countries-with-the-best-coronavirus-reponses-have-in-common-women-leaders/?sh=72dc38c63dec>

Group 3: [https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/coronavirus-cases-women-men-leaders-countries-data-a9635396.html?fbclid=IwAR1ow256nHr1mIX0SqpWYoBB-M\\_ndWea72yCmH9rnVPxJTvleY1yCQVFuxM](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/coronavirus-cases-women-men-leaders-countries-data-a9635396.html?fbclid=IwAR1ow256nHr1mIX0SqpWYoBB-M_ndWea72yCmH9rnVPxJTvleY1yCQVFuxM)

Please be sure that one of you will take notes on an (online) whiteboard that you could share with the whole group afterwards.

### **ACTIVITY 3: EXPECTATIONS ON GENDER (40MIN)**

**Objectives:** Reflect and share experiences on gendered behaviours

#### **Step 1: Introduction (5min)**

In this activity where you get to think about the potential difficulties of being expected to perform certain kinds of roles, e.g. in the workplace, which may have conflicting gender expectations attached to them.

You'll work in groups – but first, start by taking 5 minutes on your own to decide which context you want to explore, and to start answering these questions. Then, have a discussion in your group – the idea here is that it's sometimes difficult to think of these kinds of questions alone, and it can help to hear others' experiences, which can spark reflection on your own. You'll have 20 minutes to discuss as a group, and then we'll come back and share as a whole group. Please let every participant of the group share her/his individual thoughts.

You can do this activity about your work, about being a student and your experience in the university, or about a previous job you had, or even, if you're feeling brave, about the home.

#### **Step 2: Individual reflection (5min)**

The questions to think about are:

- What kinds of behaviours do you feel are expected of you in the chosen environment?
- In other words, what behaviours are you expected to perform?
- Behaviour includes ways of speaking, dressing, moving, occupying space, interacting with other people, ways of doing your work/study, asking for help, giving instructions, dealing with expectations, conflicts, wages, working hours, etc.
- Are these gendered behaviours? Do you feel that as a woman/men/diverse

person specific things are expected of you?

- -How did these expectations change during the pandemic?
- Do any dilemmas or conflicts ever come up for you in relation to how you are expected to behave?
- How do you deal with them?#

### Step 3: Group discussion in breakout rooms (20min)

### Step 4: Discussion (10min)

Let us come back into the main group. Please present what you have been discussing in the groups.

After presentations, you might have time for one additional question:

- What kinds of behaviours do you see from those at the top of your organisation/the environment you chose? Are they the same as those expected of you?

#### Ressouces:

ONHCR: Gender stereotyping. OHCHR and women's human rights and gender equality. URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/gender-stereotyping>

## ACTIVITY 4: GROUP ACTIVITY: IMAGINING AN EQUAL WORK ENVIRONMENT (35MIN)

**Objectives:** Formulation positive practices

### Step 1: Introduction (5min)

As the last activity in this lesson plan, we would like you to think about positive practises. For this, we want you to think about visions, missions and values that could lead you in an organisation. Please imagine that you are part of an organisation. Decide with the others in your group, what subject this organisation should have (e.g. street work for youngsters). Think about what visions, goals and values you would like this organisation to have. For this, please formulate a vision

statement, a mission statement and various values that should be the basis of this imagined organisation.

Please be as precise as possible.

**Vision statement examples:**

- Create a world where no child goes to bed hungry.
- To make our oceans as rich, healthy, and abundant as they once were.
- A world where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people are ensured equality and embraced as full members of society at home, at work and in every community.
- Our vision is a world in which women and men have equal rights under the law, and full enjoyment of their human rights.

**Mission statement examples:**

- Our mission is to achieve legal and systemic change that addresses violence and discrimination against women and girls around the world.
- We organize to cultivate feminist community and explore feminist values in action.

**Value examples:**

- Inclusivity: Our feminism is intersectional and inclusive. We recognize the unique experiences of those whose multiple marginalised identities intersect, and work to include and welcome all people committed to systemic justice and equality.
- Accessibility: We offer many ways to be involved, regardless of ability, financial situation or socioeconomic background and we welcome and strive to honor any accessibility requests.

**Step 2: Group work (20min)**

### **Step 3: Discussions and end (10min)**

Please share the thoughts that you discussed in the group activity.

Please be sure that you allow some time for feedback in the end of the last activity. Each participant should have some time to voice her/his opinion on the activities. And, if you have any feedback for us as the producer of the educational material, please let us know!

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