Empowerment Education Curriculum

for Girls* and Young Women* (13–22y)
Empowerment Education Curriculum for Girls’ and Young Women* (13–22y)

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1 Introduction
Introduction to the Project

The “Empowerment Education Curriculum for Girls* and Young Women* (13–22y)” that you are holding in your hands, is the second out of four intellectual outputs created by a coalition of Polish, Belgian and German feminist organisations within an Erasmus Plus-funded project under the title “Empowerment Education of Girls and Young Women, Through Educating Youth Educators and Creating Girls’ Centres”. The organisations involved, i.e. the leading Autonomia Foundation in Cracow, Poland, as well as the partners Garance in Brussels, Belgium, and "Zintzlicken" at Autonomes Frauenzentrum in Potsdam, Germany, have dedicated their work to girls* and women*’s empowerment in different socio-political contexts and in various forms. The goal is to contribute towards an equal and inclusive society by empowering girls* and young women* to play a more active role in all spheres of society.

We intend to:

1. develop, test and disseminate an “Operating Model for Girls’ Empowerment Centres” which will include the perspectives of various target groups (also girls* from minority groups);
2. create, test and promote innovative and inclusive pedagogical approaches and methodologies of empowerment education for girls* and young women* (“Empowerment Education Curriculum for Girls* and Young Women* (13–22y)”. The two initial outputs are based on good practices from our 3 countries;
3. develop competencies among educators, youth workers and trainers and supply them with adequate tools to work on girls*’ empowerment with diverse groups (“Competence Model and Training Programme for Empowerment Educators”);
4. promote high-quality empowerment education for girls* and young women* in Europe (“Model of Girls’ Empowerment – Standards and Recommendations”).

The leading partner within the framework of the publication you are holding in your hands is Garance ASBL from Brussels, Belgium. This publication was primarily created by Robin Anders and Irene Zeilinger (you can find their bio at the end of the publication). The text was later discussed among feminist activists affiliated with the other two partner organisations, who have contributed their passion for and experience in working with girls* and women* from an emancipatory perspective.

The following persons were engaged in the editorial work:

Below you will find a brief description of the project organisations.

Garance

Garance is a Belgian feminist NGO based in Brussels and active in the field of the primary prevention of gender-based violence. We provide prevention training to more than 2000 women*, children and professionals a year. To this end, we organise classes in feminist self-defence for different target groups, critically question safety and security policies from a feminist perspective, and carry out action research on gender and public space. We also train professionals in violence prevention in different contexts, e.g. youth work, schools or centres for asylum seekers. These activities are organised all over French-speaking Belgium, for Garance’s own programme and for partners from civil society and public authorities. On occasion, Garance publishes safety guides and does research and consulting. In this project, we draw from experiences and lessons from our experiences with two of our projects in the field of empowerment education and violence prevention:

- “CAReable children!” is a prevention project for primary schools where we work in parallel with school staff, parents and classes from 6–12 years on the prevention of violence against children (violence among children, sexual violence by known and unknown adults). We provide these workshops with a feminist perspective for both boys and girls* in mixed-gender groups and during school hours in the school building. The project is supported by the Ministry of Education and has achieved the EVRA label for good practice in education on relational, affective and sexual issues.
- Project “Merida” provides feminist self-defence classes for girls* to challenge gender stereotypes, strengthen girls,* self-confidence, self-efficacy and positive body image and decrease all forms of violence victimisation and the negative effects of previous and subsequent victimisations. We have developed a trainer manual and facilitation tools for age groups 8–10, 10–12, 12-14, 14–16 and offer training of trainers.

Autonomia

Autonomia struggles for every single girl* and woman*’s safety and courage, so they can make their own decisions freely, so they can develop and join their efforts to change the shape of the world together. Our motto is “strength, courage, solidarity”. We wish to build an empowered and resilient society, able to resist discrimination and violence based on gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, ability level or any other factor. As an organisation, we are strongly committed to accessibility and the inclusion of intersectional perspectives. We rely on the expertise and extensive experience in the fields of empowerment; “Women Do – feminist self-defence for women* and girls*, or in a broader scope – the prevention of violence and discrimination (including hate speech and hate crime); civic and anti-discrimination education; development of critical thinking skills and media literacy; awareness-raising campaigns and advocacy. We do a lot of civic organizing; we created and now run the first polish Girls’ Power Centre and the Girls’ Repair Café. We support professionals, organisations and institutions through training for trainers (“No one is born prejudiced” and “We Do Training Academy”); design and produce educational material (books, brochures, films), we also run the Cracow edition of the “WATChDOCS” human rights film festival; we offer counselling and support in the creation of anti-discrimination policies and solutions for public institutions, e.g. a model of anti-discrimination policy in higher education in Poland, titled “The Anti-Discrimination Standard for High Schools”.

* We use the term Girls* and Women* to indicate that our work is addressed to a wide spectrum of individuals, including persons socialised as girls, identifying as girls or having the experience of life as a girl, queers, transgender, non-binary persons, basically all the identities that have anything to do with some form of gender, irrespective of the (binary) sex/gender assigned at birth. The term (gender) is only used in quotations where it was originally present, in proper names, in critical descriptions of the patriarchal dialectics and in the historical passages where we felt it would be somewhat awkward from OCR to use.
AFZ Zimtzicken

Girls* Empowerment Centre “Zimtzicken” was established in 1996 as a project of the Autonomous Women’s Centre in Potsdam, Germany. We focus our girls’ empowerment work on girls* between the ages of 8 and 22 who define themselves as girls* and/or are socialised as girls*. We invite girls* who live in Potsdam, including long-time inhabitants, refugees and all kinds of newcomers. We offer activities and opportunities for girls* in the fields of recreation, education and social counselling. Our goal is to foster self-confidence and assertiveness and to promote tolerance, solidarity, responsibility and social participation. During our opening hours, girls* can come and go as they like. Each day we offer 2 hours of different activities in the fields of sports, democracy education and leadership, healthy living and cooking, creativity and ‘fun activities’. During school holidays we offer special activities, for example, rock-climbing, circus, horse riding, working with modern media or sailing. We emphasize intercultural activities, for example, we invite girls* from a variety of cultures to share their background with other girls; invite refugee girls*, or organize culture trips like the Vietnamese New Year in a pagoda or to the Muslim Sugar Feast in a mosque at the end of Ramadan. We are also connected with other centres in Europe, with Poland for example. We have a partnership with a Polish democratic school, “Fundacja droga wolna”, who help us to organize meetings with a growing group of Polish girls, which we visit each year in order to celebrate the international girls day and share holiday activities. We have held international girls meetings since 2012, together with Magdalena Reichardt, who is a co-author of this Operating Model.

Authors

Robine Anders is a French sociologist and feminist self-defence teacher since 2017. Since 2018, she has been working on the creation of new pedagogical contents to teach feminist self-defence to girls and teenagers at Garance. Since 2020, she has been teaching prevention and management of violence at the University Institute of Technology (IUT) in Social Career for Special Education Training in Lille (France).

Irene Zeilinger is an Austrian sociologist and feminist self-defence teacher, as well as Garance’s founder, former executive director and current international affairs officer. Over her 28-year career, Irene has trained more than 5000 women* and girls* in Europe and Latin America and is the author of the best-selling French self-defence manual for women, Non c’est non. She also has a Master in Women and Child Abuse Studies from London Metropolitan University and is currently working on a PhD at Université libre de Bruxelles on the link between violence and masculine identities.
1.1 Empowerment education and violence prevention

You have before you a handbook on empowerment education that aims to help all people working with girls* and young women* to promote their empowerment. It proposes pedagogic approaches that centre on girls* and young women’s* ability to feel autonomous and free in their choices. Empowerment is the starting point from which we propose activities and methodologies. Through these activities, we hope that girls* and young women* are able to deconstruct gender stereotypes and social role expectations towards girls*, strengthen their self-esteem and self-confidence, learn to build solidarity among girls* and women*, and feel free to choose their own paths in life. The implementation of the pedagogic approaches, the facilitation methods and the proposed tools and activities aim generally for the emancipation of girls* and young women*. In this, the handbook is an integral part of a more global approach: social change for the equality of girls* and boys. The empowerment program strives to make girls* and young women* more visible in public discourse, to promote their participation in institutions and to make empowerment more systematic in the education of girls*.

This empowerment curriculum for girls* and young women* is part of a larger project financed by the European Union that brings together the micro and macro levels in an emancipation project of girls* and young women* that considers their lived experiences as a specific form of discrimination. It distinguishes itself from analyses of violence against children and women* by recognising the violence that girls* and young women* experience because they are girls* and young women*.

Therefore we adopt a feminist definition of empowerment that aims to end the stigmatisation of girls*, in particular girls* of colour or with disabilities. Working for the emancipation of girls* and young women*, our project is to socially transform the gender order.

The handbook is, first and foremost, an outline of potential activities for empowerment and feminist self-defence. In a second part, it includes a pedagogic approach to integrate empowerment and self-defence in everyday activities for girls* and young women*. Empowerment and self-defence thereby cut across all recreational and creative activities for girls* in organisations and services that cater to their needs.

1.2 Who is this handbook for?

This handbook is not only for people already trained in empowerment and feminist self-defence, but for all people willing to promote and organise activities for girls* and young women*. Its mission is not only to disseminate among educators and facilitators in youth centres or youth services, but also facilitators in youth movements, e.g. the girls’ guides. Teachers who want to practice a more feminist pedagogy can also use the handbook to reflect on their practices. Finally, sports coaches can find inspiration for integrating empowerment into their practices.

The more empowerment is at the centre of the transmission of knowledge or skills, the more girls* can emancipate themselves from oppressive structures and power relations in which they are often un-consciously enmeshed. When everyone plays their part in their youth organisations, a real project of social emancipation and gender equality can take form and strengthen through a sustainable and feasible social transformation.

1.3 What is empowerment?

Empowerment is a dynamic process that allows a person, a collective or a community to gain strength by and for themselves: the means to develop their agency and to master their future (Kirschkorn 2011). It articulates two dimensions: the concept of power and learning methods to acquire it (Bacqué & Biewener 2015). The concept of power is particularly important as it is closely linked to that of domination. As we will see in the second chapter, girls* and young women* are enmeshed in a network of power relations where sexism and adult domination of their choices and freedom intertwine. Some are confronted with an even more complex network of oppression through their confrontation with the consequences of discrimination on the grounds of race, sexuality, transivity, disability or economic deprivation.

The concept of power and domination included in that of empowerment refers to actions that allow to impact public policies in favor of marginalised people. Empowerment means a global programme of social change from “below”, i.e. starting from the singular experiences of women* and girls*, and not for themselves, so that they can shift the power relations. Empowerment includes a simultaneous movement that roots in and gets strengthened by close relationships and the institutional level of their visibility.

The learning processes leading to the autonomy and empowerment of girls* and young women* is based on several dimensions (Stromquist 2002) on the micro (relationships) and macro level (institutions, society):

- cognitive: a critical comprehension of one’s reality and a situated awareness are necessary to identify discrimination and build resistance to it;
- psychological: the social position of the dominated and the awareness of it leading to mobilisation and self-esteem, empowerment strives to boost self-confidence and the legitimacy of one’s identity;
- political: the analysis of power inequalities becomes effective through the capacity to organise; empowerment therefore includes a dimension of collective emancipation, as changes do not happen only on the individual level;
- economic: the capacity to earn an independent income. This dimension is the least prominent for the younger girls*, but becomes important for young women* who sometimes leave their parental home when reaching their majority and can experience deep poverty.

The proposed activities and methodologies in this handbook stem from feminist self-defence approaches. Feminist self-defence offers strategies to act autonomously against sexist violence and to feel freer to act for oneself. It is a project of empowerment in the sense that it develops self-knowledge, self-esteem and a critical awareness of one’s situation as a girl/Woman* in a patriarchal society, and develops the individual and collective agency for emancipation (Bacqué & Biewener 2015). Feminist self-defence and empowerment programmes are committed to organisational and collective action, to social change towards a fairer world without oppression.

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3. For an in-depth discussion of the concepts of empowerment and power see the “Operating Model for Girls’ Empowerment Centres”.

Feminist self-defence for girls* and young women* allows to put the concept of empowerment into practice in order to:

- control yourself the way you live your life; feeling and understanding your emotions, needs and boundaries; giving meaning to your lived experiences; forming your own opinions;
- control your relationships to others; being able to choose with whom you are in contact and in which ways, with the aim to have authentic, enriching relationships based on mutual respect, equality and safety;
- take responsibility for the consequences of your choices and take care of yourself: having your boundaries respected while respecting those of others, resisting paralysing self-blame, refusing to take responsibility for other people’s actions or to delegate your responsibilities to others.” (Zellinger 2008: 46)

The concept of empowerment is one of the principles of feminist self-defence that aims to improve self-confidence, agency and critical reflection (see chapter 3.)

However, the activities included in this manual are, by far, not all that there is to feminist self-defence. We have chosen those that are easy to do as standalone activities and can be facilitated by youth workers without training in feminist self-defence. For those who want to go further, it is possible to become a feminist self-defence trainer by following a training curriculum alongside their work. Training of trainers is organised according to different terms and conditions in many countries.

*Autonomia organises training of trainers through their WemDo Training Academy for people from Eastern European Countries, and Garance provides training of trainers for French-speaking candidates. In Germany, several training of trainers programmes exist that adhere to a national quality standard overseen by Bundesfachverband feministische Selbstbehauptung und Selbstverteidigung e.V., see www.bfselfest.de.
Empowerment and feminist self-defence are closely linked approaches. Empowering girls through feminist self-defence gives them efficient tools against sexist, racist or ableist violence that they may be confronted with. Girls experience more gender-based violence and, consequently, have a greater need to defend themselves against it. Gender-based violence can take verbal, physical, psychological, spiritual or economic forms. There are relatively few specific quantitative data on violence against girls. However, several trends emerge and allow to draw a picture sufficiently close to girls’ lived experiences, in order to be able to reflect on how to accompany them on their way towards emancipation.

Considering severe forms of violence, the girls experience more sexual violence than boys. From the age of 15 on, the majority of sexual violence is perpetrated exclusively against young women. In almost all cases, the perpetrator is a man, known by the girl and, most commonly, a family member. The nuclear family environment appears to be the most violent space for girls; here, sexual and physical violence take place, often preceded by verbal and emotional abuse. Even when they are not directly targeted, girls’ self-image is often the result of what they see and hear within the family.

The more girls grow up, the more circles of sociability and acquaintances they have, the more the spaces of potential violence increase. School appears to be a space particularly characterised by verbal and psychological violence that often extends to social media. School bullying interferes and imposes itself in girls’ and teens’ intimacy, letting go in order to care for themselves is particularly complicated in this context. They submit to the ongoing injunction to control their image out of fear of becoming the laughing stock of the whole school. They know that they need to navigate hegemonic beauty norms because each physical characteristic could become the target of derision, e.g. their skin colour, their physical capabilities or the shape of their body.

During adolescence, girls travel most often alone or with friends. They experience a new type of aggression: harassment in public spaces. It impacts their sense of safety, but above all their self-confidence. Girls internalise the social image and norm that they are not allowed to complain (a lot). Complaints are being understood as impolite, disregarding the arguments being made and the right of every girl to speak her mind. When girls are followed in the street, they experience heightened fear for several days afterwards before being able to talk about it to a person of trust.

When they can file a complaint for more serious forms of violence or school bullying, they hesitate. First of all, they would need to talk about the incident, which is everything but easy and depends on the trauma they experienced and the resources that are available in their immediate environment. They often think that what happened to them is not serious enough, that the police cannot do anything about it or that the perpetrator will not be punished. And they are not completely wrong to think so. Sometimes, they are afraid of retribution or that things will get even worse should they talk. They feel ashamed and think that they will not be taken seriously.

2.1. Developmental psychology, the framework of Girls’ empowerment work

This handbook tries to make up for a lack – not the girls are found insufficient, but the information and resources they receive. Therefore, the handbook contributes to education for self-esteem and self-care, for the right to act freely, for the recognition of injustice and discrimination, for the setting of their boundaries against violence in all its forms. To develop this approach, we need to understand how girls’ and young women’s function during their development. Developmental psychology is the scientific discipline examining the changes and transformation processes of psychological functioning (cognitive, affective and social functioning) of the individual over the lifespan. The theoretical framework is very general, as development can vary from one person to another, but it provides a reliable overview for developing activities that meet the needs of girls at different ages.

Development can be defined as “the mutual and progressive accommodation of intertwined structures.” It is an adaptive process with respect to systems or interlinked social environments (e.g. the family system in relation to the school system) that occurs over time. These systems affect the child and are, at the same time, affected by the child, but not necessarily in the same proportions. The child integrates formative elements of different environments, but the child also modifies them by participating in the environments. These social environments can be defined as systems of relationships that impact the child’s growth and thriving.

2.2. The development of autonomy

Girls are enmeshed in emotional, financial or spiritual dependency from adults, but that does not mean that they cannot have social relationships and references of their own. This social life allows them to develop a practical and material culture where beliefs and knowledge can be explored, independently and often in opposition to, beliefs and knowledge transmitted by adults. Freedom from constant and close surveillance is a key element to their emancipation and an essential vector to their autonomy. In informal spaces such as schoolyards, the street, holiday camps etc., girls experience their achievements, certainties and practical and theoretical knowledge, and not all of them stem from their education.

Adults and their immediate environment order the material environments in which girls interact. (Cour, 2017). It is in this framework – structured by material conditions – that girls find the opportunities for autonomous transmission of freedom or for playful and affective creation. Some of this autonomous knowledge that girls transfer and maintain is universal. For example, there is a multitude of games with different names, but the rules and objectives of the games remain the same.

These “children’s cultures” are not only characterised by games and knowledge, but also by a more or less strong opposition to adults’ rules and expectations. Due to the pressure of the framework, they develop strategies that allow them to escape constraints without openly violating the rules (Goffman, 1979). These strategies demonstrate that these practices do not originate with the adults, but come from a “girls’-only” space and the confrontation with rules and norms. These deviances from adult injunctions are invented and transferred (to not fit, to not be calm, to not always be polite...). Girls master these strategies, e.g. pretending a sudden belly ache to ignore an instruction, from the age of 3–5 years. It allows them to achieve satisfaction or to work towards it without having to confront the adult power directly and without derogating clearly and frontally from the rules.

According to a IPSO survey (Enquête d’opinion sur les violences sexuelles, 2019), the prevalence survey on violence against women in the Brussels Capital Region (2008), and the YSOA survey on the impact of sexual violence from childhood to adulthood (2016).
2.3 Specificities of development phases

Teens from 13 to 15 years

This age corresponds more or less with the entry into adolescence. This period is marked by the start of biological puberty (generally between 10 and 17) that comes with new physical, intellectual and social experiences. In Europe, at this age, the institutional violence of school increases: prolongation of schooling, more individual homework, pressure of competition through rankings and grades... which leads to quite specific forms of isolation and de-individuation (Festinger et al. 1952).

During this period, girls* experience many changes and acquire a lot of resources on the cognitive, social and affective level. These developments are constantly in tension between the urge to distance themselves from authority and an identification with the adults. A significant change occurs in their ability to think about the world on their own. They develop their abilities to consider different angles of a problem or a situation. They analyse these actions in function of the circumstances, the personality of the protagonists and the relationships they have with them.

Girls* are more autonomous in relation to the practical and theoretical knowledge transferred by authorities e.g. parents, school... They need to understand the logic in an argument to support it. The importance of logic leads them to new ways of moral reasoning. This moral judgment is based on the values and rules they share with a group (family, peers, institution...). Often these values and rules are integrated as norms. At the same time, they take into account the intentions of people more than their actual actions. Girls* distance themselves from the argument of authority without being completely independent of it.

Teen girls*, particularly in the beginning, are rarely in peace with their body image. Beyond what they think or see in the mirror, their self-image is also the image that other people reflect back to them. They try to adhere to the hegemonic beauty criteria reported in the media, but also to conform with their peer group's appearance. They often form their identities according to stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. Generally, these norms block their possibility to live their sexual and gender identity freely. There are very few references that would allow them to open their imaginary world to deconstruct the gender binary. Trans* and non-binary youth then struggle to find the gender identity that suits them.

Girls* self-esteem is very degraded because this is often a moment where they lose their cues and they are inundated with images with which they can identify. Teen girls* are in a period of uncertain identity construction where their physical and physiological change is not always controlled. It is a period of real vulnerability. These sometimes brutal changes lead in general to a decrease, if not a sudden drop, of girls* self-esteem. The narcissistic behaviours at work during this period can be understood as a sort of compensation of the mechanisms of questioning their identities. Finding their place in a group is an important preoccupation. When working with teen girls*, it is important to strengthen their self-esteem and to provide them with images they can identify with without promoting individualistic selfishness.

Teen girls* who are the most comfortable with themselves are those whose parents or communities manage to maintain a balance between a reassuring presence and respecting their need for independence and singularity. Teens pay a lot of attention to the respect of boundaries and rules, even when transgressing them. Rules and frameworks can contribute to their identity construction, even when they are disrespected. Confronting adults* boundaries is one way of identity building and experiencing transgression without taking enormous risks. Different ways of interacting with authority figures have a strong impact on teens' behaviour, in particular with respect to their autonomy. The clearer a fixed set of rules is, the better their autonomy can evolve in a reassuring way.

13- to 15-year-old girls*

Needs

- Independence
- Knowledge of self
- Can reason without material support
- Need to understand the logic behind an argument

Development phase

- Taking initiatives
- Taking responsibilities
- Puberty, ambivalent relation to body between disgust and admiration
- Logical reasoning
- Conventional morals

Activities

- Games with active participation
- Activities with responsibilities

Learning

- It is necessary to alternate between the liberation of energy and grounding. Sometimes they need adults to manage their puberty, they are rarely comfortable with their bodies.
- Exploration and sports activities
- Skills development discussions

Social

- Search for “who am I?”
- Recognition, finding one's place
- Search for diverse groups

- Analysing the actions of a person according to their conditions and personality
- Making friends
- Belonging to an identifiable group
- Enthusiasm for big projects
- Anything new is in the foreground
- Ambivalence between shyness and voracity, coyness and mocking of others, absolute selfishness and self-sacrifice
- Difficulty to recognise oneself
- Steep drop in self-esteem

Psycho-affective

- Questioning oneself, difficult self-acceptance
- Return of oppositional crises with authorities (family, school...)
- Need for affection and independence
- Demand for affection by aggressiveness
- Abandoning of activities assigned to boys
- Wish to be taken seriously
- Rejection of family values

- Need to pull away from the parents
- Projects with adults
- Identification with idols
- Proving to be capable of...
- Not being considered a child anymore
- Questioning in relation to the body, homosexuality, gender, increased risk of depression and self-harm

- Reassuring adult presence during activities
- Sports activities
- Board games
- Novels, comics
- Photography, music
- Altering individual and collective activities

Girls* are now confronted with a larger group and need to find their place in it. They have unstable energy and tire quickly. They want to understand inequality, better know others and themselves. If they do not understand each other, they can be very incisive among themselves. Making friends, being popular in their peer groups, and establishing strong relationships with other teens are central preoccupations.

It is very important to work on self-worth and body image. Girls* of this age need to test, and confront themselves with, the boundaries of the space to be able to establish their individuality. Careful with competitive activities, as those may be experienced with difficulty.
**Teens between 15 and 18 years**

The end of adolescence is a period of consolidation of the achievements and the winding down, if not the stabilisation, of earlier changes. On the level of reasoning, teen girls* are able to nuance their judgments by looking for solutions based on general moral principles. They develop their ways of thinking from individual choices, not always in conformity with their peer groups or family norms. Their judgments seem to form more freely and even to overcome the moral principles in which they were brought up. They nuance their discourse with more ease, taking into consideration different viewpoints to feed and test their own opinions. This allows the older teens to understand new issues. They try to situate themselves in terms of privilege, to develop ideas on politics, the social organisation of society, injustice and discrimination.

These ideologic reflections are also a way to look for affiliation, a sense of belonging based on shared ideas. The need to belong can become so strong that some teens find themselves in a sometimes dangerous process of mental manipulation. Teens know themselves better and have more self-confidence than younger girls*, but their will to be different and to assert themselves can lead them to look for belonging with dangerous people such as sexual abusers who quickly understand their need for approval. Other risk behaviours can emerge, e.g. regular drug consumption or serious eating disorders such as anorexia. Despite better self-confidence, they may find themselves drawn into dynamics that overwhelm and harm them. Habits from childhood, the physical and mental costs of new responsibilities, their ambiguous motivations are factors that often create contradictions between everyday practices and moral judgments. Teen girls* do not like to be confronted with these paradoxes because they do not necessarily know what else to do. They have not yet developed the necessary resources for being level-headed, stable and coherent between what they do and what they think.

On the emotional and affective level, this period is marked by the experience of new romantic and sexual relationships which can take up a very important space in their girls* and young women's* lives. They discover a relational intensity and intimacy that can provide structure to their personal development. Romantic or intimate relationships lead them to discover new aspects of their sexuality and sensations. Adolescence, with all the upheavals it includes, is a period of experimentation and testing relationships and their boundaries. Experimenting new things inevitably creates the space for the girls* that may lead them to taking risks. This intensity can make them lose themselves in a romantic and/or intimate relationship and withdraw from the world, to cut themselves off from their friendships and family relationships. Romantic and sexual relationships can lead to emotional and/or physical abuse. The central issue of this phase of adolescence is to be able to take risks to better discover oneself and thrive while remaining physically and emotionally safe.

Even if stereotyped images still have an impact, teen girls* distance themselves from them and criticise them more often than before. Their identities assert themselves and lead them to important choices for their further lives. They may prepare to leave the family home, to become independent of their parents and other adults’ expectations. This can also be a period of crises, as the teen girls* reference persons (e.g. parents, teachers, youth workers) do not always understand their choices and orientations. Girls* of this age need support without being suffocated. They have a hard time to find a balance between discovering new experiences and the potential dangers involved and they may need to start again repeatedly before they find this balance and thrive and evolve in a safe way. To maintain social bonds and trust, it is important to not judge them but to approve them, so that they can draw lessons from their mistakes, by themselves and for themselves.

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**Needs**

- Autonomy
- Sleep
- Self-knowledge
- Intellectual development

**Development phase**

- Taking initiatives
- Taking responsibilities
- The notion of (their own) personal boundaries
- Passage from the logic of situations to the reasoning of a reflected opinion
- Reasoning abstract ideas
- Post-conventional moral (16 y)
- Relation to the body: sexual drive manifests itself, identification with strong body norms, possibility of eating disorders
- Difficulty to accept their bodies

**Activities**

- Creative activities
- Discussions and debates on precise topics
- Sports activities: trekking, bicycling, sailing, skiing, canoeing...

**Learning**

- They aim to assert themselves in groups in different ways, seek contact with the other genders and analyse themselves among each other to define their own personalities. They lack balance, do not know where they are going and need idols. They can go into opposition with each other on the theoretical level. They need girls* spaces and mixed gender spaces.

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**Social**

- Recognition
- Importance of the group and belonging
- Girls* spaces and mixed-gender spaces
- Professional life
- Strong and authentic relationships

**Psycho-affective**

- Being considered a responsible person
- Opposition to authority
- Maturity of the personality
- Maturity of intelligence

**Conclusion**

- Help teen girls* to accept their bodies
- Value them because they need trust to improve their self-confidence and self-esteem
- Know how to answer to provocations because they are a call for attention or help
- Broaden their imagination and questioning to build their own personalities
- Social and ethnic differences are visible and need the questioning of privilege
Young women* from 18 to 22 years

Reaching the legal majority provides more rights to young women*, but also more responsibilities. This period is somewhat similar to early adolescence: young women* can feel lost between contradictory injunctions, of what they want and what they need, both freedom and responsibilities. This tension can destabilize young women* who have a difficult time finding affective and financial resources. They leave their family home and sometimes have to provide for their needs fully or partially. For example, in Belgium there is little support for people younger than 25. Their financial situation often worries them. Some young women* have to work to finance their studies or financially support their family or communities. This is especially true for Poland. Young women* face various challenges described here and in the previous section much earlier—for example related to violence and to the need to support themselves, all the more for students.

Class and race determinisms play a role in establishing their life paths. Even if some escape these generalities, young women* whose mothers, aunts or sisters have not had the opportunity of a university education tend to "chose" short and vocationally oriented curricula or apprenticeships to be able to provide for themselves. Sometimes, young women* feel or actually are required to help their families financially. Their existential choices are more geared towards their primary needs than desires or dreams.

By entering into the world of employment, young women* have to face a new type of violence: workplace harassment. Women* working where they have a direct contact with clients are particularly concerned by sexist insults, while sexual violence can be committed by a colleague, client or superior.

For those who have the privilege of higher education, their family relationships can suffer from financial dependency on their parents, which is in opposition to their need to be independent. Educational institutions also are violent spaces: competition among students, high work pressure, a culture of partying and alcohol excesses, violent hazing rituals, sexist and sexual violence in universities, rape culture, etc.

Sometimes young women* change their peer groups radically when leaving secondary education. Depending on their chosen paths, they may have difficulties forming new friendships. However, they experience a strong need for trustworthy relationships outside of the family. As these needs are so important, they are not always aware of what they are willing to regain stability and safety in their daily lives.

If the nuclear family or the community was a violent space before, mental and physical violence continues during young adulthood, even if they diminish in frequency. Young women* having experienced sexual abuse during their childhood or adolescence have a higher risk of adopting sexual risk-taking behaviours (multiple unknown sexual partners, unsafe sexual practices.) (Ferguson et al. 1997). Often young women* feel the need to let go, given the stress of their new responsibilities. Many of them use one or more addictive substances (tobacco, alcohol, illegal drugs) (Wilnak et al. 1997). This period of growing independence and freedom is a mixed start, as they can experience violence. Public space is clearly marked by repetitive verbal and sexual attacks by strangers older than themselves. The risk of violence and manipulation by an innocent partner is particularly high at this age.

It is difficult to effectively reach out to the target group of young women*, and sometimes young women* are so overloaded with additional classes, tutoring, household chores or extracurricular activities, or on the other hand, so „neglected" that almost all organizations and institutions indicate the absence of such girls* in their activities. They do not socialise that often in youth centres or other services anymore. However, this is a moment in their lives when they may need...
support in gaining independence in a healthy way. This period is rich in emotions, discoveries and new experiences, but also psycho-social danger. Young women* talk openly about their lived experiences. In general, young women* having benefited from reassuring social environments during their childhood and throughout their socio-affective development experience fewer difficulties, while social inequalities are reinforced. How girls* and young women* are adapting often depends on their affective and emotional resources received earlier, regardless of their social and ethnic origins. As we will see in the following section, the group composition can play an important role in making an organisation, service or activity accessible to girls* and young women*, and it is particularly important for feminist self-defence activities that need an increased level of trust and safety in the group.

2.4 Gender dynamics in peer groups

Mixed-gender groups

Although the majority of schools are co-educational, children tend to play in single-gender groups. This gender segregation is enforced by boys disrespecting girls* and their activities. When asked why they want to participate in a feminist self-defence workshop, 8- to 10-year-old girls* answer that they do not want the boys to bother them anymore. In general, this trend towards single-gender groups reaches its peak at about 11 years and diminishes gradually afterwards (Maccoby 2002). The need to integrate single-gender groups is linked to general differences in preferences and behaviours. Girls* spaces develop from the relationships between children, but above all from their previous socialisation experiences, in particular within the family or community.

Children, when among themselves, reproduce gendered forms of social control that they experience in private space. Therefore, boys enjoy direct physical confrontations (e.g. tag and ball games). Girls* play more static games with indirect or no confrontations. Children mutually police their behaviours, and a boy and a girl* being friends, within the context of heteronormativity, will be immediately “accused” of being in love. Nonconformity to gender norms is one of the primary reasons for often violent mockery. Up to the age of eleven (end of primary school in Belgium), girls* are less exposed to bullying. However, gender segregation varies depending on contexts and their issues. For example, in a group where race relations play out*, the requirement to conform with gender expectations will sometimes be replaced by a taboo: a Black boy and a white girl* cannot be in love. This representation is too far from their reality and they cannot even imagine it. When mixed friendships (in terms of gender, race or class) develop in school with a diverse population, they cannot exist outside school. In general, mixed-gender relations are easier in the closer social environment such as family, the neighbourhood or extracurricular activities. These spaces are less exposed to the attention and control of other children.

The construction of gender stereotypes at school

Gender stereotypes are also constructed and perpetuated inside the school system. Boys receive more attention than girls*, and their ways of reasoning are valued more. Girls* are rather expected to carefully execute exercises, where appearance is more valued than the solution of the given problem (Mosconi 1994). Researchers observe that girls* succeed better in school in terms of learning and marks, a trend that reverses as soon as they enter the job market (Durubellat 2004).

Schoolbooks and various teaching aids (for students as for teachers) are also characterized by stereotypes that play an important role in the process of gender socialisation of children, e.g. through an overrepresentation of men compared to women*, which participates in the reproduction of girls* and women*s invisibility. Different treatments and expectations within family or school institutions prompt girls* and boys to adapt their behaviour to these more or less explicit norms. These different treatments and expectations for girls* and for boys structure their relation to the world, their self-image and their outlook for the future (Morin-Mescal & Salle 2013). Under the cover of gender neutrality and gender integration, school remains a space that produces gender socialisation and internalisation of femininity norms and where rivalry among girls* is soaked in structural power relations, since class and race have an important impact.

* The term „race” describes a social relationship in which white people explicitly or implicitly discriminate against those who are not perceived as white or who have a non-Western-sounding name. Colette Guillaumin-Sexo, race et pratique du pouvoir. L’idée de nature, 1992.
The learning of class and race

In terms of sociability and friendship, class and race are most important in the worlds of child socialisation. Children connect more easily with other children of the same social and migratory background as theirs. This is called homophily: the tendency to develop friendship more easily with people who resemble us. But contrary to adults, social diversity among children fosters friendships among children of different origins: spatial proximity encourages social proximity. State-run schools therefore could enable the building of heterogeneous friendships. However, this social diversity only works during class and has little impact outside of school. Yet the most lasting socialisation occurs outside of school, during extracurricular activities for the middle classes, or within the extended family or neighbourhood for the working class. In terms of socialization, the principal consequence of this homophily is that it strengthens rather than mitigates parental influence.

Generally, childhood is represented as a particular period of life, that of cognitive learning. Yet, girls* are rarely considered as a social group within which social inequalities could impact the acquisition of knowledge and physical and psycho-affective development. Far from wanting to confirm deterministic ideas about children’s life paths, we need to acknowledge that inequalities are entrenched, learned and experienced starting in childhood. Housing seems to be a determinant factor: e.g. having a room of one’s own, living in a housing project, having one’s neighbours, having a garden... these are criteria that form the relationship to the self, to one’s social and racial origins, sense of belonging and experiences of discrimination. Just like language, privileges and the shame of one’s self and origins are learned and performed through games. Martine Court (2017) explains that “as early as seven or eight years, children have a certain consciousness of the hierarchies that structure the social world, and they are able to position themselves with a certain accuracy – at least when they know their parents’ professions.” (128) In the same way that children construct their knowledge of the world through others, they also envision the paths that they are supposed to take.

Cultural products structure a part of this learning process. The knowledge and knowhow transferred within the family is integrated explicitly and implicitly. Explicitly, through cultural products at the disposal of all children, such as music, films, exhibitions, books, libraries. However, the larger part of socialisation occurs implicitly in everyday life, through simple gestures and sentences. Children capture gestures and imitate, little trivialities that adults use to judge and be in the world, verbal and non-verbal micro-judgments of oneself. They integrate them in their understanding of the world and replay them in their imagination. This learning is largely done through body language: parents express through a smile, a look, a position and a way of speaking the link they have with the context in which they interact. Children learn to decipher this language and can interpret the feelings (joy, fear, anger...) of adults even if they do not speak (Florin 2019). Children grasp in a sort of practical comprehension the power relations that construct their identities. However, each micro-interaction fits into a web of experiences. On the one hand, practice and discourse are not always coherent, and on the other hand, parental behaviour differs depending on contexts and situations. These diverse socialisations form varied, singular and even contradictory frameworks for the comprehension and perception of the social world.

Children are born into social contexts and environments that structure their first experiences in terms of creating sociability and developing their psychological, affective and kinetic abilities. To center one’s attention on girls* allows them to understand how certain mechanisms are integrated and construct their individualities. The issues of power relations and domination that span girls’ experiences cannot be reduced to the sole issue of gender. Gender oppression can only be understood in conjunction with other power relations, in particular those of classism and racism. Girls*, even more than women*, build their identities along power relations, through them and in opposition to them. Gender is never independent of class or race. Girls* experiences of sexism cannot be disconnected from the social spaces where they occur.

Gender is not considered a fixed attribute – essentialist and determining the identity of individuals – but as an observable aspect of and through social relations. Nevertheless, certain sociological data can be generalised or, at least, show a general trend. For example, girls* on average do better in school than boys and are less involved in organised sports. This is not a result of any biological differences, but of the gender order that impacts individual behaviour and choices in ways that, on the surface, appear natural and normal.

2.3 The making of gender

In the family

Even before birth, parents treat their children according to their gender. They do not address a male or female embryo in the same way. The majority of parents attribute gender characteristics to their children when they are still in the mother’s womb or just born (e.g. girls* are cute and dreamers, boys are strong and alert). Children’s immediate environment has a distinct impact on their gender construction. Very early, parents interpret their child’s behaviour according to gender lines. For example, girls* get punished much more quickly and easily for violent and ‘leader’ behaviour, while the same behaviour would just be considered as aggressive in a boy, and even valued.

According to their child’s assigned gender, parents generally arrange a particular environment so that the child sees itself and is seen by its surroundings as a girl* or a boy (a traditionally binary perspective). Parents encourage certain dispositions over others in function of which gender they think their child belongs to. With respect to activities associated with danger and risk taking, parents show more concern and prudence with a child assigned as a girl* and give more support for the activities for a child assigned as a boy. Feminine childhood cultures are characterised by this anxious relation to risk (falling, hurting oneself...), and by the helping relationship with adults when they navigate a space that is considered potentially dangerous. On the contrary, boys’ childhood cultures are rather characterised by the appreciation of their autonomy and courage, e.g. through exercises that need risk taking or physical effort.

Also, in respect of learning processes, boys get more encouragement for understanding what is going on, while encouragement for girls* focuses rather on the execution of an exercise. The explanations given to boys are more detailed and varied than those given to girls*. The difference of the parental behaviour depending on the assigned gender appears in many domains: participation in the household chores, the choice of cultural and sports activities or the relation to the body. Parents have different expectations depending on their child’s assigned gender.

Besides their expectations, parents impact their children’s gender socialisations in more insidious ways by directly and indirectly passing on gender roles that they take on in everyday life, e.g. by the division of household tasks, the more or less stereotyped stories they tell their children or the naming of the categories of “girls’” and “boys’” (Florin 2019). Girls* often only see a division of household work where the mother works much more than the father. Before 10 years, all children like to help or to imitate their mother, but after that age, girls* spend more time on tasks inside the house (weeping, cleaning the table...), while boys work outside (mowing the lawn, pruning trees...). It is a logical reproduction of what they observe and of more or less explicit instructions (Florin 2019; Court 2017). Knowledge and lived experiences in the parent-parent or parent-child relationship
contribute to the process of identity formation in children. Therefore, these experiences contribute to creating deep beliefs in children, even if most of the time, this occurs in implicit ways. This can be seen, for example, in children’s understanding of their parents’ work. In a heterosexual family, the mother’s work will often be seen a choice rather than a necessity, unlike the father’s work. Parents are the first models of femininity and/or masculinity that children identify with and who they relate their proper gender ideas and identities to.

In public

In school, boys’ aggressive behaviour is considered inevitable and is less punished than the same behaviour in girls¹ who, from 5 years on, integrate a very stereotyped performance of femininity to meet what they think are adults’ social expectations. In extra-curricular activities, e.g. sports, gender segregation occurs. Certain disciplines promote the integration of gendered behaviour (e.g. posture, smiling, slenderness). Gymnastics or dance for girls² and football or combat sports for boys answer these expectations. Many parents agree to their child’s wish to practice a sport, but geographic distance and the atmosphere in a sports club will influence girls³’ parents more than boys⁴. However, parents hesitate to sign up their daughters for sports that are non-conform to femininity ideals.

2.6 The paradoxes of education and autonomy

Structuring environments

Children are not only determined by their neurological functioning, their genes or their social environment: children also take part in their own development since they integrate what they see and smell according to the benefits they can derive from it (Fiorin 2019). Girls⁴ therefore have a certain leeway in the multiple systems of domination that act on them. Their gender expression or understandings of their social roles are determined not only by society. By different ways of establishing themselves as subjects they constitute their individuality, even if their individuality operates within a social structure characterised by relations of power and domination that affect their development. However, social privilege (white privilege, access to education and middle-class, valued culture, access to participate in sports and leisure activities, living conditions, material stability and stability of family bonds...) impacts the agency of girls⁴.

From the interplay of girls’ environments, resources and agency we can conclude several points for our political stance as youth workers in the field of violence prevention:

• As youth workers, we do not have power over all the systems in which girls⁴ evolve. We need to identify the zones where we can act in favour of their autonomy, empowerment and agency in respect to violence.

• We can have an impact on girls’ behaviour and perceptions of the world and the violence they may experience. However, we cannot measure how these, sometimes tiny, changes will destabilise the relations of power and domination to which they are subject. As we will see, these systems also adapt to girls’ actions and their ways to play a role within them. One of the pitfalls of our practice could be that we think that empowerment and antidiscrimination education will allow them to leave behind those mechanisms where violence exists. But this complex system may keep them back, and we have little control over it. Only the girls⁴ themselves can change the systems of violence in which they live.

• Everything changes all the time, and experience makes us question solid certainties. For girls⁴, experiencing their capacities to defend and assert themselves and to set their boundaries can have a very concrete impact on the way they interact. This is an experience in and of itself. In our workshops, we provide them with tools to act on the microlevel when they are confronted with violent or transgressive interactions. This experience can allow them to rethink earlier experiences and to act on them in the future. In terms of empowerment, this system of interconnected experiences also indicates that a negative experience, e.g. a violent incident, will not necessarily traumatisingly. Later experiences therefore play an important role in girls⁴’ empowerment in respect to a serious incident.

Taking into account all these shifting realities, as well as the age and maturity of the girls⁴ does not jeopardise the goals of feminist pedagogy. Approaches and considerations that take into account the person as a whole are described in the following paragraphs.

The consideration of the whole person

As we have said above, a girl⁴ is not only a girl — she is the product of a series of social factors that form her identity and her relationships with others. This principle refers to the idea that we are faced with a girl¹ in her entirety and not only one of her specificities (e.g. she is not “a migrant girl⁴” or “a girl⁴ wearing a headscarf”). However, it is sometimes difficult to be inclusive for all girls⁴ when some of them consider misogynous, racist or Islamophobic opinions as self-evident. It can be complicated to take into consideration and deconstruct the girls’ biases without challenging their background, often the family. That would be challenging their identity construction and question what seems self-evident to them in a way that they cannot accept. For example, the discussion on the prejudice that a girl⁴ in a short skirt provokes sexual assault sometimes breaks the group cohesion, reducing the trust and therefore the moral and affective safety within the group. One of the crucial issues in facilitating girls’ groups is to maintain a safe framework while letting girls⁴ express their opinions to debate them and deconstruct their biases. Tempestuous and sometimes long debates are not necessarily a sign of loss of trust in the group or the facilitator. On the contrary, to be able to express their ideas, girls⁴ need a safe space. In any case, we should pay a lot of attention to the power relations in those moments of lively discussion. A girl⁴, her lifestyle or her belief system can be challenged and she can be the direct or indirect target of the other girls’⁴ racist or misogynist bias. The facilitator has to find the right moment for setting boundaries without curtailing their reflections, for redistributing the floor so that everyone can express their ideas...

Girls⁴ construct their identities from the tension between similarity and opposition. Taking a position against a group or the facilitator is another way to experience a social position that they are maybe not used to. In the same way, leaving the safe space that has been collectively agreed on at the beginning of the workshop allows them to confront themselves to authority and boundaries; to develop a more balanced identity and to learn to gauge when overstepping rules is necessary for their own safety (even if we want to avoid this in a workshop, of course). In addition, girls⁴ are educated and socialised to seek the competition with each other, to create rivalry rather than solidarity. They are used to compete rather than to help each other, to envy and disparage rather than compliment and congratulate each other. Those social dynamics make it more difficult to foster inclusion and the understanding of the importance of solidarity. The practical experience of solidarity through games is often more efficient than fine speeches.

The tension between similarity and opposition can also affect girls’⁴ ways of sharing their experiences. They adapt their discourse to what they think are the facilitator’s and the groups’
expectations in order to belong. The younger the girls*, the more they will tend to answer in ways that they think the facilitator wants to see or hear. The older they are, the more the teens will adapt their answers to what they think will enhance their image and their position within the group. The co-construction of knowledge and knowhow therefore is difficult because girls* at first are subject to social dynamics of which they are not necessarily conscious. For the facilitator, the challenge is to build sufficient trust for the girls* to feel legitimate in saying what they want to say or share. We will come back to this point when we talk about partiality. In a feminist self-defence workshop, one of the most complex issues is to increase women’s* and girls’* self-esteem. Therefore it is important that they can express their experiences and share success stories to improve their self-image and to lead them to co-construct the content of the workshop. During adolescence, co-construction is more difficult due to the drop in self-esteem that 12- to 13-year-olds generally experience.

The principle of consideration for the whole person in feminist pedagogy is based in the holistic idea that we cannot dissociate the body and the intellect in order to avoid naturalising or essentializing women’s* identities. As their bodies change and provoke hormonal turmoil, girls* often want to separate body and head. They develop protective mechanisms that lead them to cut off their feelings and sensations. At the onset of adolescence, they rarely are comfortable in their bodies. Therefore we have to be careful not to suggest that if they are not comfortable in their bodies, they are not comfortable in their minds, which is not necessarily the case. This discomfort makes it more difficult for them to listen to their body and its signals to identify their personal boundaries. They tend to not want their body to change, to not want to listen to it, and particularly when puberty arrives suddenly and leads to awkwardness towards oneself and others, they have a hard time to understand it.

The principle of partiality

The principle of partiality is based on the idea that we as facilitators are concerned by the relations of domination that target the participants. It overlaps with the principle of self-determination: we recognise that each participant has the right to define her identity according to her own needs. In this regard, partiality consists in political commitment on the side of our target group, that is to say that we do not only work with them, but also for them and go in their direction.

In practice, the principle of partiality means to recognise that each girl* is the expert of her own safety, that she is the only one who knows what is good for her or what is dangerous. This poses several difficulties. Firstly, girls* generally do not have this expertise, in the sense that adults rarely provide them with opportunities to experiment what is good for them or not. Adults, and in particular parents, impose bans, often without even explaining why certain actions are not allowed. Girls* are more used to following rules than to understanding by and for themselves what they can do. It seems logical in the sense that small children do not know that it is dangerous to put their fingers into a socket or to cross a busy street for example. It is necessary to ban a certain number of actions instead of letting children make their own experiences. However, pushed to its extreme, this focus on rules expropriates girls* of knowing their own sensations and feelings and, by extension their own boundaries. The appropriate balance has been developed in feminist pedagogical approaches such as Freinet, De Certeau or Montessori, where an important place is reserved for experimentation. In our workshops, it is therefore important to inspire in girls* a taste for finding out things for themselves and to show them that they can trust their feelings and intuitions: they are valued, desired and even indispensable for acting by and for oneself. An important issue of empowerment is to instigate their drive to know themselves so that they can be aware of what is not good for them. In that way they can trust themselves in identifying what is not ok and learn how to defend themselves against it.

In political terms, partiality includes another challenge, that of advocating in favour of the prevention of violence against girls*. The principle of partiality includes the idea that as facilitators, we have the possibility and responsibility to advocate for violence prevention with a specific political discourse that establishes violence against girls* as different from violence against children and violence against women*. Violence against girls* is on a continuum of patriarchal violence, but has specific issues.

The principle of coherence

The principle of coherence is particularly important to feminist self-defence, as it unites theory and practice. This means that what we think has to correspond to what we do. Our values have to show in our goals, as well as in the methods and tools we apply when facilitating workshops. The principle of coherence raises several challenges when working with girls* and young women*.

One of the most important elements for empowerment is the voluntary participation of the girls*. If workshop participation is mandatory, we have to assume that listening to each other and respecting the boundaries of each participant will not be possible. It often happens that girls* are forced to participate in workshops. Sometimes parents or legal guardians sign them up without really explaining what they are going to do. When we work in cooperation with other youth organisations, girls* sometimes are required to participate, either because they have signed up and are not allowed to change their minds or because they are blackmailed – if they do the workshop, they can also participate in that other activity they really want to do. The coherence between our framework of voluntary participation and the constraining realities of girls* therefore cannot be guaranteed. In addition, minor girls* often cannot leave the workshop if they want to: the parents or legal guardians have delegated their duty of supervision to us when they drop off their daughter. Younger girls* even do not have the physical possibility to leave because their parents or guardians dropped them off and they do not have an independent means of transport. That means that it is very important to offer alternatives so that girls* can feel less forced to participate if they do not want to anymore.

In our workshops we employ a discourse and practices to combat power inequalities and domination. Partiality means that we are sensitive to the hierarchical relations at work between the facilitator and the participants. As adults, we unavoidably are in a power relation with girls*, in particular those younger and dependent on us. Girls* are not completely autonomous in terms of their physiological needs (rest, hunger, hydration, hygiene…). We are legally responsible for minors during a workshop and therefore we have power and responsibilities towards them and their parents/guardians. In addition, they are used to hierarchical relations with all adults, to doing what adults ask them to do without necessarily questioning the demand. They expect us to propose activities and they answer our questions. This hierarchical relationship, that is most prominently maintained by the school, makes co-construction more difficult: girls* are often used to top-down knowledge and learning rather than horizontal learning based on sharing what each one already knows. It is particularly important to think about these relations so that girls* can make use of those moments and do not experience it as a competition for the correct answer. By striving to reduce the hierarchical distance between facilitator and girls*, we contribute to reducing hierarchies within the group. For example, not reproducing forms of adulthood or ageism is particularly complex when conflicts emerge between them.

As we have already said earlier, sharing our personal experiences and emotions is valued during our workshops because they are a source for the co-construction of knowledge and know-how. It is not always easy to establish a link between the workshop content and the lived experien-
periences of the participants. On the one hand, girls* and young women* tend towards telling more spectacular
narratives to make them more attractive. We do not try to establish if they are true or even credible, but when they are not, this can provoke discomfort in the group and even a loss of
authority or trust in the facilitator. If the shared experiences are too far removed from a shared
everyday reality, it is difficult for the group to analyse them and produce workshop content from
them. Also, girls* profit from the workshop space to test their “morbid fantasies”. Therefore, they
regularly end up telling the most awful stories they have heard. This is problematic on several
levels: they risk to feed irrational fears of other participants, but also to provide examples that are
far from reality and discredit the facilitator’s knowledge, as the stories decenter the continuum
of violence against girls* that is the focus of our prevention workshops. For example, stories that
girls* regularly tell in workshops are about a woman who killed and froze her children or a col-
lective rape in the cellar of an apartment block. We cannot deny that such things may happen,
but those examples feed the myths and stereotypes about violence against girls* that we strive
to deconstruct.

What is Feminist Self-defence?
Feminist self-defence is close to, and sometimes mistaken for, other body practices for women* and girls*, such as recreational martial arts or combat sports. However, feminist or empowerment self-defence is a holistic approach to the primary prevention of gender-based violence. Across the many methods existing internationally, some defining elements are recurring and distinguishing feminist self defence from traditional/mainstream self defence approaches (Channon & Matthews 2015; Lenard 2015; Madden & Sokol 1997; Searles & Berger 1987; Thompson 2014). Feminist self-defence takes the entire continuum of violence against women* and girls* into account and provides tools to counter physical attacks, discrimination, harassment and microaggressions, including by intimates and acquaintances. At the same time, it addresses the intersection of systems of oppression other than sexism. To these ends, feminist self-defence provides a broad range of mental, emotional, verbal and physical tools to resist violence and discrimination. It is specifically aware of the risk of victim blaming and therefore attributes the sole responsibility for violence to the perpetrator and pays attention to survivors of violence. Its critical pedagogy questions power differences between teachers and participants, among others through the co-construction of knowledge and know-how, and helps to overcome women’s* isolation through a collective learning process. In all its variations, feminist self-defence focuses on the empowerment of the victim.

This differentiation is relevant not only historically, but reflects the need to distinguish feminist self-defence from current approaches that lack its in-depth analysis of gender-based violence and use traditional safety discourse based on fear, and focus on physical self-defence only. Feminism has had an influence on some mainstream providers, to different degrees, and feminist self-defence has evolved with the increasing knowledge and understanding of gender-based violence, including an intersectional analysis (Speidel 2014).

3.1 A short history of feminist self-defence

Through the ages, women* and girls* confronted with violence have tried to protect themselves. Legends and historic accounts, newspaper articles and court records are a tribute to their capacity to resist violence. Many of these instances of self-defence occurred outside of a purposeful, premeditated practice that requires training. However, with the rise of the women’s movement and the growing awareness of violence against women* as a social problem, around 1900, the Western world saw the start of a new practice: feminist self-defence.

According to French philosopher Elsa Dorlin (2017), self-defence in the hands of any oppressed group is a means of insurrection. It subverts power relations in three major areas: Firstly, to defend oneself, one has to value oneself, which goes against the grain of oppression that is rooted in devaluing the underprivileged. Secondly, to defend oneself, one has to overcome structural inequalities and stereotypes, e.g. weak and passive femininity and strong and invulnerable masculinity. Finally, the act of defending oneself claims oppressed people’s right to exist and to live without violence. A unique concurrence of circumstances prepared the way for women* and girls* to learn how to defend themselves (Dorlin 2017; Looser 2010). At the end of the 19th century, one of the many cultural exports in the wake of the colonisation of the Japanese empire were martial arts, foremost Jiu Jitsu and Judo (Godfrey 2013). These practices received a boost by two young movements and their intersection: the physical culture movement and the women’s* movement (Looser 2010). Anglo saxon countries were the first to welcome Japanese martial arts. In Victorian society, urbanisation and industrialisation caused an increase in poverty and violent crime. Japanese martial arts were perceived to level the playing field of physically unequal adversaries and therefore as particularly interesting for women*. Poor women* and girls* worked more often outside the private sphere, while those of the middle and upper classes ventured outside for participating in culture, social reform and leisure activities. As a consequence, they were more present in public space where they were confronted with sexual violence that targeted them specifically. The progressive upper and middle classes accepted self-defence as a means to safeguard women’s* and girls* mobility in public space and defend their respectability (Godfrey 2013; Rouse 2017).

Women’s* participation in martial arts is first documented in Britain in 1899, when Edward W. Barton-Wright, the inventor of Bartitsu*, offered classes for women* (Godfrey 2013). When gymnastics teacher Edith Garrud and her husband took over the dojo of their Japanese instructor Uyemichi Sadakazu in 1905, she was in charge of classes for women* and girls*. Garrud was a supporter of the movement for women’s* suffrage, and soon, the more radical suffragists, as were called the activists for women*’s right to vote, embraced self-defence as a means of emancipation and political resistance, leading to large-scale training of activists and memorable contests with the police (Godfrey 2015).

Across the Atlantic, as early as 1889, a women*’s sports club in Los Angeles offered self-defence classes, probably based on wrestling and boxing (Rouse & Slutsky 2014). However, these practices were presented as beneficial to women’s* health and fitness, rather than a means for women’s* safety and emancipation. Some socialists engaged in the social reform and suffragist movements of the US American Progressive Era recognised the political implications of learning to defend themselves. In 1905, they organised a first class for women* and girls* run by Yama-shita Fude, the wife of a Japanese instructor touring the country, on the lawn of the White House and with the support of president T. Roosevelt (Rouse 2017). In their approach, self-defence was seen as a way for women* and girls* to protect themselves against gender-based violence and gain broader freedom. Women* and girls* soon practised self-defence in schools, on campuses and in local churches. In newspaper articles, theater productions and novels, women* and girls*’ success against violence by strangers was celebrated as a result of their martial arts prowess (Rouse 2017). However, with other sports, there also was a strong resistance from the clergy, educational professionals and the media against women’s* boxing and jiu jitsu, precisely for their potential to challenge gender norms (the perceived natural order) (Rouse & Slutsky 2014).

World War I put an end to the suffragist movement and feminist self defence in Britain and the US. Institutions without a feminist perspective, such as the police, the military or sports organisations, continued to provide classes for their female clients, but without the objective of emancipation. For this reason, as well as the general reluctance to allow women* in any "manly" sports, lost their reproductive functions might suffer, women* were extremely underrepresented in martial arts after World War II.

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8 For example the legends of Saif and Hafneris, or of Ng Mu, founder of the martial art Wing Chun. For historical personalities resisting violence, see Nany of the maroons (Jamaica), Bartheleimea Se (Bolivia), Magaret Tucker (Australia), Grazia Nadis (Spa), Remedios Guzman Paradis (Philippewalking), Fama Yacoumer (Algeria). Examples for historical newspaper articles and court records illustrating women’s* capacity to resist violence can be found, for example in E. Freedman (2013) Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation. Harvard University Press.

9 In continental Europe, Japanese martial arts evolved more slowly, and women* and girls* participation was largely frowned upon (Dowith 2001). Lighter women* were associated with vulgarity, where boxing and wrestling women* had popular numbers, and in countries such as Germany, martial arts were considered a while undertaking and women’s* participation in contradiction to the nationalists, and later national socialists, gender ideology.

10 Bartitsu is Barton-Wright’s reincarnation of martial arts he learned during a four year stay in Japan. Bartitsu includes not only unarmed techniques, but also the use of a walking cane. The best known, albeit fictional, proponent of Bartitsu was Sherlock Holmes.
This changed with the emergence of the women's liberation movement at the end of the 1960s. Cell 16, a women's writing collective in Boston, were the first to develop feminist self-defence (Dundar-Oritz 2001). After hostile encounters during direct actions in public space, the group realised the need for learning to defend themselves. They took classes from a male Taekwondo instructor, but left due to his sexist attitude and created a women-only training group that later organised workshops for other women*. In other cases, feminists trained in martial arts developed their own self-defence curriculum, which was often based on the realisation that the martial arts world did not provide a safe space to learn meaningful and effective defence techniques (e.g. Sunny Graff in Germany (Graff 1997) or Jy Bateman (Bevacqua 2000) and Helen Groom Stevens (Searles & Berger 1987) in the US). The feminist reappropriation of male-dominated self-defence methods for women* repeated itself several times, e.g. for Model Mugging in the US (Jackson 1993) and Wen-Do in Canada. The reasons for the schisms were often sexism and different conceptions of violence, resistance and political objectives.

During the 1970s, feminist self-defence came to signify the movement's quest for liberation. Feminist pamphlets and resource books routinely included self-defence information. Anti-racism projects integrated self-defence classes in their list of services. The demand for self-defence training was such that new trainers needed to be trained (Law 2011) and long waiting lists had to be managed (Cauzert 1999). The 1980s saw several parallel evolutions. The growing awareness that women* are situated differently in society live different experiences led to a diversification of the self-defence offer; specific classes for girls*, lesbians, women* with disabilities, women* of color (BIPoC) and older women* emerged. At the same time, the need to differentiate feminist self-defence (FSD) from mainstream providers and to achieve the recognition necessary for the continued survival of the practice led to the conceptualisation of FSD (Searles & Berger 1987). Self-defence practitioners and teachers had an international perspective, which translated into methods being exported to and from other countries and the creation of training camps like the Feminist International Summer Training in the Netherlands.

Several factors led to a decline in the demand and support for feminist self-defence while mainstream self-defence for women* and girls* continued to grow at the end of the 1980s.

- The inter-feminist conflict on self-defence: Within the feminist anti-violence movement, critical voices emerged, leading to self-defence being sidelined and even disparaged. Three major reproaches were formulated: Feminist self-defence was victim blaming (Gavry 2005); individualised and depoliticised violence and resistance (Bevacqua 2000); put the onus of violence prevention on women* and failed to hold men accountable. Although each of these reproaches have been refuted, the conflict led to feminist self-defence being marginalised within the anti-violence movement (McCaughey 2015). As a consequence, it suffered and still suffers from a lack of visibility and support.

- Anti-feminist opposition to programmes for girls* and women*: Although, or because, positive action has been recognised as a legitimate means of achieving equality, measures favoring women* and girls* are under anti-feminist attack. This is not different for feminist self-defence. E.g. in 1993, the University of Stanford abolished a feminist self-defence class in 'voluntary compliance' to a determination complaint by a student. However, feminist self-defence has been demonstrated to qualify as a legal means of positive action (von Lehmann 1995).

- The instrumentalisation of feminist discourse by the safety industry: The feminist anti-violence movement's effort to start a public conversation on violence against women* had a certain success. Unfortunately, this made the topic accessible to mainstream actors who capitalise on the increased awareness of gender-based violence with often commercial offers that use a depoliticised language of empowerment. As these actors are not beholden to a political movement and, at the same time, profit from male and other privilege, they constitute a serious and unfair competition for feminist self-defence.

The fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 opened the door for more international feminist cooperation. Feminist self-defence was among the practices that found a fertile ground in several Central and Eastern European countries. In most cases, the practice was first transmitted by self-defence trainers from neighboring countries such as Germany and Austria in the form of individual self-defence workshops. Once feminist self-defence was more widely known and practiced in feminist organisations and collectives, the 2000s saw the development of training of trainers, in a first phase by Western European trainers and in a second stage independently. This was the case in Poland, where the Women’s Foundation eKa organised the first training conducted by trainers from Germany, and Autonomia foundation the next - facilitated by trainers from Poland and taking into account Central European realities. Autonomia provides training of trainers independently since 2015 and also expands the practice to other Central and Eastern European countries.

Apart from these general evolutions, feminist self-defence has evolved in very different ways across the globe. In North America, a significant proportion of female university students have taken training (Brekcin 2004; Senn et al. 2015), and feminist self-defence is used in some Women’s Studies classes (Cermele 2004). In Austria, it has been sidelined by free training provided by the police. In the Netherlands, the government recognised a trainer diploma (Seth & Kelly 2003). In France, feminist self-defence became nearly extinct at the turn of the millennium and activists had to go abroad to receive trainers’ training. In many places, feminist self-defence providers had to shop in the 1990s and 2000s due to a lack of funding and difficulties in renewing the trainer teams. The anti-feminist backlash in Central European countries such as Poland aggravates the lack of structural support and leads to self-defence trainers being accused of acting against the Polish tradition and family. Throughout its long history, feminist self-defence has always depended on the personal commitment of individual trainers and therefore has to still be considered a precarious practice.

3.2 The impact of feminist self-defence

The main objective of feminist self-defence is to teach women* and girls* to successfully resist and prevent violence. Through practice and embodiment, these skills impart participants with awareness about and control over potentially dangerous situations, thereby transforming the way they see themselves and the world around them. This has a number of consequences beyond violence prevention:

- Fear typically changes in quantity and quality and decreases significantly (Ball & Martin 2012; Hollandier 2004; McDaniel 1993; van Baaren & van der Pligt 1995), which is a
major motivation for women* to take up self-defence training (Hollander 2010). In the
classes, fears can be shared and critically examined (Brecklin & Middendorf 2014) and
gender-based violence is framed as a contingency, not an inevitability (Cermele 2004).

• **Self-image and body image:** Participants develop their perceived self-worth (Hollander 2004, 2016) and accept themselves as agents of their safety (DeWeede 2003). Experi-
encing one’s body not as a source of problems, but as a powerful ally and tool for their safety improves participants’ body image and reduces body shame (Hollander 2016).

• **Self-defence and self-efficacy,** i.e. the belief to be able to defend oneself against attacks increases due to training participation (Ball & Martin 2012; Hollander 2004; Hu-
ghes et al. 2003; Orchowski et al. 2008; Ozer & Bandura 1990; van Baarsen & van der Pligt 1995). This generalises to other contexts, such as sports, or general self-efficacy (Hollander 2014; Ozer & Bandura 1990; Weitlauf et al. 2000, 2001).

• **Rape myth belief**1: Feminist self-defence training leads to a significant reduction of rape myth endorsement, in particular of victim blaming (Senn et al. 2008; Senn 2012).

These changes reflect a reduction in gender norms, which liberates participants, at least partially, from the constant assessment of their gender conformity (Hollander 2015). It has to be noted that while all types of self-defence for women* and girls* can have an emancipatory impact on participants (McCaughey 1997), there are important qualitative differences between feminist and mainstream offers, with feminist and feminist-informed approaches achieving better results (Ball & Martin 2012; Hamel 2001).

Research indicates that women* with self-defence training experience as many or fewer assaults, but not more, than women* without training and are more often able to interrupt the assaults that do occur. The existing research is nearly exclusively focused on sexual violence victimisation, giving little indication of feminist self-defence’s impact on other types of violence. In addition, relatively few evaluation studies have used randomised control trials, the current gold standard in terms of quantitative evaluative research. However, the handful of studies on feminist self-defence that have been done, come all to the same conclusions (Hollander 2014; Sarntrot et al. 2014; Senn et al. 2015; van Baarsen & van der Pligt 1995). Trained women* and girls* experience fewer incidents of violence after participating in FSD than their control groups, and when confronted with attacks, they are more often able to defend themselves successfully and escape unharmed. Therefore, feminist self-defence is not only a means of protection against violence once it is already occurring, but has also the potential to effectively prevent gender-based violence.

Feminist self-defence can play an important role for survivors of violence: as a means of primary prevention, it improves self-confidence, awareness and assertiveness and helps to avoid victimisation; as secondary prevention, it allows survivors to name violence as such and provides a safe, non-judgmental space where violence can be disclosed and isolation can be overcome; and as tertiary prevention, it contributes to processing, integrating and healing the traumatic experience (Bauer 2001; Brecklin & Ullman 2005; Rosenblum & Taska 2014). Therefore, the impact of FSD on survivors has been examined repeatedly. Not only has no negative impact been found (Brecklin & Ullman 2005); in addition, evaluations have demonstrated that self-de-

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1 Myths about rape are widespread, and research indicates a correlation between belief in these myths and rape victimisation in women* on the one hand and rape perpetration in men on the other hand. Rape myths include, e.g. that raped women are mentally unsuitable, do not know their victims, carry out their assault in abandoned streets after dark, that men have an irreplaceable sexual drive, that women* provoke rape by their clothing and behaviour, and only young, attractive women* can be victims of rape.
Toolbox
4.1 Creating age groups according to the phases of development

On the basis of the conclusions of the last chapter, we have established overview tables of the specific needs of girls* and young women* according to their age. It invites to reflect about how to constitute age groups where girls* and young women* feel comfortable to participate in empowerment and violence prevention exercises. It brings together the type of activity or teaching aid with the vital cognitive, social and psycho-affective needs of girls* according to their age, without rigidly fixing the scope and type of possible empowerment activities. We based this overview on the phases of development used in development psychology (Florin 2019) and crossed them with sociological data. Facilitators and educators can use them as a reference point and guideline to construct coherent activities that reach their pedagogic objectives.

The overview tables on pages 18–19 show that girls** needs change over time, and to reach the same pedagogical objectives, we need to adapt our activities to their age. We also see that teens and young women* do not function at the same rhythm. It is important to start from games and co-constructed facilitation to transfer the theoretical knowledge that they can integrate into their practical knowhow. Younger girls** will participate more willingly if they can expend their energy in physical activities. Older girls** will be more open to use their imagination for creating scenarios for which they can find solutions. They have less need to expend their energy, but movement is necessary to discharge emotions or uncomfortable sensations. The duration of concentration also changes with age and the phases of development. With younger girls**, it is necessary to change activities more quickly than with young women* who can engage in longer activities.

The tables serve as reference points, but do not take into account the girls’ different living realities. For example, the phases of development differ depending on the girls’ material living conditions. Those who have benefited from security and love during childhood will fit well in the tables. Others who have experienced violence will show accelerated development in some aspects and slower development in others. For example, girls** growing up in dysfunctional families including child abuse or violence between their parents, may show a more adult stance because they need to keep themselves safe. This situation forces them to adopt avoidance behaviours and strategies to maintain the family relations. They develop hypervigilance and are rarely in a calm emotional state. They may appear ‘mature for their age’ because they are forced to take up important affective, emotional and sometimes economic and care responsibilities early on.

Equally, girls** exposed to more or less explicit racism and violence risk growing up with self-hate and reach young adulthood with a particularly deteriorated self-image. The phase of restoring one’s self-esteem that is typical for young adulthood may be delayed, because they have been forced to interiorise a demeaning self-image as persons of colour. Therefore it is necessary to provide a particularly safe space where they can feel comfortable and benefit from the proposed activities without experiencing new incidents of racist violence within the group.

4.2 Integrating an intersectional pedagogic approach

Intersectionality conveys the idea that certain people are on a crossroads of several forms of domination and power relations (Crenshaw 1989, 1991), for example at the intersection of sexism, racism, ableism or leshophobia. This distinguishes their situation of oppression from people experiencing only one form of domination, leading to different situations needing different answers. If we want to develop an empowerment, education programme with girls*, our mission is to reach out to all girls*. Therefore, we need to think about the impact of racism that, for some, may be as important as the impact of sexism (Berg 2019). We have to take into account that for certain girls*, defending themselves physically or talking loudly and assertively could reinforce racist stereotypes of people of colour being aggressive and uneducated (hooks 2015). For younger girls*, these dynamics often remain unidentified and unnamed, but they are embodied. This means that racism is integrated in their relationships and their way to present themselves and act in public. The fear of verbal, psychological or physical retribution can limit their agency. Therefore, violence prevention strategies need to include this dimension. Their socialisation as girls* who are rendered doubly vulnerable through their gender and race is not determinant, it does not guide all their actions. It influences them, but does not fix their agency (hooks 2017).

Girls* and young women* of colour undergo a specific form of sexism and misogyny. They experience discriminatory and/or violent discourse or behaviour not only because they are girls*, but also because they are of colour. Ordinary racism refers to social relations where practical actions of white people produce – involuntarily and unthinkingly – racist behaviour. This goes from micro possibilities like comments on hair texture and the surprise to discover a person of colour in a position of responsibility to a continuum of violence, colourism**, and poverty. As facilitators, we have to pay attention to these realities, in particular if we are white. We can make space for girls** of colour and validate them. We can name the fact that white people constitute a dominant social group with violent, behaviour towards people of colour who experience double violence. They know already that, in general, they have to make more effort to be considered as equally valuable as white people. They have to further increase their efforts if they want to be seen as equally competent as white boys. These are systemic relations of domination where it is necessary that girls’ of colour find autonomy. As facilitators, in particular if we are white, we need to let them express themselves, as they are the experts of their own safety and we do not know their experiences and strategies that they have already developed to face sexist and racist aggression. They have the answer to increase their agency. Our work consists in giving them the opportunity to express themselves and to acquire tools for setting their boundaries and defending themselves to their best possibility. It is important to validate the success stories of girls** and young women* of colour. We need to bear in mind that the racist and patriarchal system may make them feel exhausted and despondent, but that they also have developed a larger array of strategies. Their self-esteem may be even more deteriorated by the lack in popular culture of strong models of women* of colour.

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** Colourism is discrimination on the grounds of pigmentation, it establishes a hierarchy among people of colour where those with a lighter, closer to white pigmentation or who can pass as white have advantages.
4.3 Empowerment activities

Facilitating empowerment and violence prevention activities with girls* is fascinating. The activities proposed below have been tested with different age groups and evaluated by feminist self-defence trainers and the girls* themselves. They have been collected in two parts: icebreakers and energizers, and activities that teach tools for empowerment and violence prevention. The latter are divided into four groups: prevention strategies, identification and setting of boundaries, violence prevention in given situations, and physical defence practice (accessible to facilitators not trained as feminist self defence trainers).

Icebreakers and energizers

Icebreakers allow girls* to meet and enter into contact with the group. These games play important role in building trust within the group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Icebreaker</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The name game</td>
<td>A girl* throws a stuffed toy in the air calling the name of another girl* in the group. The other girl* has to catch the toy before it hits the ground. Then she can throw the toy and call another girl* etc.</td>
<td>12 to 15 years olds and girls* with learning disabilities</td>
<td>10 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>Stuffed toy or foam ball</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The love chain | The objective is to create a chain based on what each of the girls like. The girls walk around the room. One of them stops, legs apart, and calls out her first name and one thing she likes. Another girl who likes the same thing puts her foot next to the first girl and says her name and one thing she likes. The other girls join the chain on either end in function of their tastes and preferences. The facilitator can propose variations (e.g. what I like to eat, what I like to do in my spare time, what I like to do to feel good...). | 15 years and older | 10 min |
The wind is blowing on

Overview:
The girls sit on chairs in a circle, one of them stands in the middle. She says, e.g. “The wind is blowing on everyone wearing white socks”. The girls wearing white socks have to change places while the girl in the middle tries to get a seat. The last girl is next to call out a characteristic she shares with other girls in the group, etc.

Objectives:
First contact between participants
Getting into movement
Liberating energy and beginner’s stress
Creating relationships between participants

Materials:
Chairs

Sequence:
The island has to be small so that it is not easy for the warriors to stay on the island. The game can get very dynamic, and safety rules are needed: no pulling of hairs or clothing, not doing anything that hurts, a safe word that stops the game if a girl* is hurt or overcome. The warriors that the crocodile manages to pull in the water become crocodiles, too, and can pull other warriors into the water. The game is over when all warriors have become crocodiles. Debriefing: what worked well to pull warriors into the water? What worked well to stay on the island? Propose another round and in the second debriefing link the experience to feminist self defence:
  • Introduce the solid and balanced stance starting from the warriors’ stance that is the basis for self-defence: legs apart at shoulder width, knees lightly bent, arms hanging along the body.
  • Strength against strength (warrior and crocodile pulling in different directions) does not work very well, it is better to briskly alternate pulling and pushing to destabilise the other person.
  • Holding on to each other is effective and fosters solidarity among girls*.

Crocodile and warriors

Overview:
A mat on the floor is an island of warriors; in the water around the island lives a crocodile. The crocodile wants to pull all warriors into the water to eat them. The warriors try to resist and stay on the island as long as possible.

Objectives:
First contact between participants
Getting into movement
Creating relationships between participants
Addressing first notions of self-defence (grounding and solidarity)
Experiencing a solid stance

Materials:
A judo mat, chalk or duct tape to mark off an « island »
Facilitation tools from feminist self-defence

Overview:
Participants have to find strategies, mime them and have the others guess what it is. Afterwards, they name the six families of strategies.

Objectives:
Co-construction of knowledge
Multitude of possible reactions
Validated and share individual resources
Trust and group cohesion
Overcome isolation by sharing experiences

Materials:
Sticky notes
Strategy posters
Erasable marker

Sequence:
The facilitator plays or narrates the context: “You have got some pocket money for your birthday and, with a friend, you go shopping. You are lucky and there is a sale and you can buy a lot of stuff. Then you go home on foot and you get the impression that a man is following you for five minutes already. To start with, you cannot touch the man. But then, anything goes. What would you do?” The participants work in groups of four. They have to put their ideas for action together and note each one on a sticky note. When they have finished, the facilitator collects the sticky notes, mixes them and piles them up. By turns, a girl* comes forward and mimics the action on the sticky note. When the group has guessed the action, the facilitator sticks the notes on the wall ordering them by strategy. She can leave out the not recommended actions and those she is unable to file in one of the strategies.

When all sticky notes have been guessed, the facilitator explains that these actions can be called strategies. She asks the girls* for a definition of the word andcomplexes if necessary, all the while insisting on the preventative and premeditated character of strategies. She presents the strategy posters (illustrations of the strategies). The girls* attribute each poster to one of the groups of sticky notes on the wall and name it. They are allowed to write the name of the strategy on the poster: verifying, evaluating the situation, running somewhere safe, defending yourself with your body or with words, making noise/yelling, getting help, pretending something. The facilitator can use the girls’ words if they indicate the same idea.

To finish, the facilitator asks what would work best when using strategies: having one’s own strategies that work for ourselves, combining them and always ending with running away.

Variation: with older girls*, it is possible to have the action on the sticky note guessed by providing a definition before miming them.

Identifying and setting boundaries

Overview:
The facilitator reads the story of the tiny and the big NO. The girls* identify the emotions in the story and the facilitator insists on the three rights. Then the girls* learn to say no effectively (boundary exercise).

Objectives:
Identifying the importance of body language
Understanding the importance of boundary setting
Experiencing confrontation
Identifying important elements to succeed in confrontation

Materials:
Story text

Sequence:
Part I.
The facilitator reads the story of the tiny and the big NO. At the end, when she reaches the passage on the three rights, she mimes the movements for safety, strength and freedom. Then she asks the girls* questions.
- What happens in the story?
- How does the tiny NO feel in the beginning? And in the end?
- How do we feel when someone takes away our rights?

The facilitator and the girls* mime the three rights, saying “I have the right to be safe, strong and free.”

Part II.
Boundary exercise. The facilitator invites the girls* to practice saying no like a big NO does. The girls* stand in two lines about 4 meters apart, each one with a partner on the opposite line, face to face. The girls* on one line play the big and imposing woman* and the others the NO. To say no effectively, like a big NO, the legs are apart. The facilitator invites the girls* to imagine that under their feet, roots grow and keep them firmly on the ground. They breathe in from the very ends of their roots until their belly inflates, and then they breath out and feel how their feet sink into the floor, as if they can feel the roots breathing under their soles. When the girls* are calm, the facilitator asks the girls* playing the woman* to advance slowly and without laughing towards their partners. The girls* playing the NO say no when they think the big lady is close enough to talk to her without it being awkward. Together, they give a name to this space: the personal bubble, the intimate bubble, the comfort zone... The facilitator asks questions to make them understand that this distance is personal, it is more or less the same for everyone, but not entirely. She asks why this distance could change: in function of how one feels and with whom one is taking. Our bubble or comfort zone changes all the time and adapts to us and to the situation. Then, the big ladies step back and start all over, but this time the NOs imagine that their bubble is the most important thing in the world and say no or stop in the most convincing way possible. The facilitator asks what makes it more convincing: the tone of voice, the facial expression, the body posture. Then the girls* change ro-
les and the facilitator starts again with the exercise of breathing through one’s roots. The facilitator congratulates the girls* and tells them that they always have the right to say no when they feel that someone takes away their rights.

The second part can be adapted for the older girls* and young women*. They can choose names of famous strong women* for their lines, e.g. Hermione Granger and Rosa Parks. The debriefings can be more precise on the reasons why boundaries are individually different and on the verbal and non-verbal elements of an effective no or stop.

They can also add a last step: if the no of the Hermione Grangers is not convincing enough, the Rosa Parkses can continue to advance so that the Hermione Grangers have to set their boundaries more strongly to stop their Rosa Parkses. Change roles.

Key messages:

• We have the right to be safe, strong and free, all the time and everywhere.
• There are more and less efficient ways to protect our three rights. But when someone takes away our rights, it is never our fault.
• We can set our boundaries with all our body or only with our voice.

The tiny and the big NO
adapted from a story by Gisela Braun and Dorothee Wolters (illustration)

The tiny NO goes for a walk in the park.
As it is a little hungry, it sits on a bench and eats some biscuits.

It is a really small, teary-weepy NO. It is very quiet, even when it eats.

A big and impressive lady comes and asks smiling: “Can I sit down with you?” The tiny NO whispers: “No, I prefer to be alone.” The big and impressive lady does not listen and sits on the bench, just beside the tiny NO.

Then a mischievous boy comes along and asks: “Can I have your biscuits?” The tiny NO mumbles again: “No, they are mine, I do not want to share.” But the boy does not listen. He takes away the tiny NO’s biscuits and starts to eat them.

Then the park warden comes along. The tiny NO has seen him a couple of times. He says: “Hi, tiny NO, you are really cute. Can I give you a kiss?” And the tiny NO whispers: “No, I do not want a kiss.” But the man seems to not hear and comes closer with a kissy mouth.

Now the tiny NO gets angry. It jumps up, makes itself big and shouts with all its strength: “NOOOO!!!!!” And it shouts again: “No, no no! I want to be alone on my bench. I want to eat all my biscuits myself and I don’t want any kisses. Leave me alone, all of you!”

The big and impressive lady, the mischievous boy and the park warden are surprised: “But... why didn’t you say so?” The tiny NO looks at them glowering, and the big, impressive lady, the mischievous boy and the park warden leave.

And who is sitting comfortably on the park bench now?
No, this is not the tiny NO anymore, this is the big NO! Now it feels safe, strong and free. It thinks: “Oh, so this is how things are. If I always say no with a soft, weak or shy voice, people do not listen. To be safe, strong and free, I need to be firm and clear.”

And this is how the tiny NO became the big NO.
3x STOP | 12 years and older
20 min

Overview:
The girls* learn to set their boundaries in different positions. They experience a surge of adrenaline when they do not see the person coming against whom they have to set their boundary.

Objectives:
Confrontation training
Feeling the effects of adrenaline
Identifying the alarm signals of adrenaline
Working on intuition

Sequence:
The girls* form two lines face to face at a distance of at least five metres. The A line set their boundaries and the B s try to cross it.
1. A is standing upright and turns her back to B. B moves slowly towards A. When A feels that B reaches her boundary, she turns around and says stop firmly and clearly.
2. A sits on the floor and turns her back to B. B moves slowly towards A. When A feels that B reaches her boundary, she stands up, turns around and says stop firmly and clearly.
3. A lies on the floor on her belly, her feet towards B. B moves slowly towards A. When A feels that B reaches her boundary, she stands up, turns around and says stop firmly and clearly.

Change roles and places.
The objective is for A to be in a stable position when she sets her boundary.
After everyone has experienced the exercise, the facilitator can ask for the girls’ feedback:
- How did you feel?
- Have there been any uncomfortable sensations and where in the body were they located?
- At which moment is it the easiest to say no? Why?

Key messages:
- Our body does not have sensations just to bother us, they are there to indicate where our boundaries are and when to set them. Our body is our ally.
- The earlier we set our boundaries, the easier it is. We do not have to feel all kinds of uncomfortable things before we can set our boundaries.
- Geeking and smiling when a situation is not funny are also signals that our body sends us when our boundaries are not respected and we feel uncomfortable.

The hot chair | 14 years and older
40 min

Overview:
During this exercise, the girls* experience their sensations when they say yes or no to different propositions, independently of their choice. The objective is for them to identify physical signals that indicate their boundaries.

Objectives:
Becoming aware of boundary transgressions
Tackling the concept of consent
Learning to say no
Experiencing discomfort in a paradoxical situation

Materials:
1 chair

Sequence:
A girl* sits on the chair, the other participants line up two meters in front of her. The first girl* in the line asks the sitting girl* a question and then goes to the end of the line. The first time around, the sitting girl* has to answer yes to all the questions of the other girls*. When the first girl* is again at the beginning of the line, the sitting girl* now answers no to all the new questions. All girls* who want can take a turn on the consent chair.
The facilitator explains before the start of the exercise that the sitting girl* can decide to stop at any time, even in the middle of a turn or question. If this happens, it is a good point for feedback and debriefing later on.
When all the girls* who wanted to experience the consent chair, they sit in a circle for the debriefing. To guide the discussion, the facilitator can ask questions such as:
- How did you feel? Why?
- What did you feel when you received a proposition? And when you made a proposal?
- How did you feel when you said yes to something you don’t really like? And when you said no to something that you love?
- What happens in our bodies? Did you have any physical sensations?
- What does that tell us about our boundaries? What is consent?

Key messages:
- Our body tells us things; here, it tells us that the situation is not comfortable. It sends us signals. Our body is our ally.
- Stress is important. It tells us that something is important and should not be minimised. Feelings like anger are important to understand a situation.
- Under the influence of adrenaline, stress and anger push us to act in a way that is ok for us. Sometimes, adrenaline takes up too much space, our body freezes and we don’t know what to do anymore. It is the same with animals. For example, when an animal crosses the road and car lights shine on it, it is so surprised that it does not move anymore. But when it understands the situation, it can run very quickly.
- In order to be safe, strong and free, it is important to keep moving to avoid freezing up. The quicker we react, the less our body risks freezing up. It helps to
**Other small exercises on boundaries**

**Piss off!**  
**15 years and older**  
**15 min**

**Overview:**
The girls* stand on two lines a couple of metres apart, face to face. On the facilitator’s signal, the two lines walk towards the centre. When two girls* meet in the middle at about 1m distance, they stop, look into each others eyes and, with serious body language, tell their partner “piss off”, “get lost”, “fuck off”... The first to laugh has lost! Change partners and start again.

**Objectives:**
- Experiencing assertive body language
- Keeping a straight face when setting one’s boundaries
- Learning boundary setting
- Group cohesion

**1-2-3 STOP**  
**12 years and older**  
**15 min**

**Overview:**
One girl* stands with her face against the wall. She calls out and counts with her hand on the wall “1-2-3 STOP” and turns around after the stop. While she is counting, the other girls*, starting from the other side of the room, advance on her. As soon as she turns around, they have to say stop assertively and not move anymore. Those who move or laugh have to return to the starting point. The first girl* to reach the girl* while she is counting has won and can start the next round.

**Objectives:**
- Experiencing assertive body language
- Keeping a straight face when setting one’s boundaries
- Learning boundary setting
- Group cohesion

**Acting against sexist and sexual violence**

**“Sarah’s courage” – picture book**  
**12- to 14-year-olds and girls* with a learning disability**  
**30 min**

**Overview:**
The facilitator reads the book to the group showing the pictures. Then she starts a discussion on the respect of physical integrity. She discusses with the group the definition of sexual violence and what to do when it happens.

**Objectives:**
- Identifying sexual violence
- Co-construction of knowledge on bodily integrity
- Recognising a trusted adult
- Distinguishing between a comfortable and uncomfortable secret
- Applying prevention strategies
- Feeling legitimate to make choices for oneself

**Materials:**
- Book “Sarah’s courage”

**Sequence:**
The facilitator reads the story of Sarah’s courage and shows the pictures. Before starting, she explains that the story is about violence, that it ends well, but that it is not a funny story. At the end, the facilitator can guide the discussion with the following questions:
- What happens in this story?
- Are Sarah’s three rights respected? What is the problem? What is an aggression or sexual violence?
- What is the uncle’s condition for helping Sarah? What does he tell her not to do?
- How does Sarah react? Is it easy or difficult to react like Sarah?
- How does the mother react? Do all mothers react like that? Are there other people we can talk to when we have problems? How can we recognize a person of trust?
- Is there something that you would like to change in the behaviour of Sarah’s brother or mother?

The facilitator can address the role of the little brother, explaining that Sarah could ask him if he experiences the same situation. It is difficult to do, but maybe the girls* want their brother’s rights to be respected, too. The first person to think about is oneself, but we can also make sure that the little brother’s rights, or those of a sister or cousin, are respected, too.

**Key messages:**
- I have the right to be safe, strong and free!
- We decide what happens to our body. The respect of our body is unconditional, we have the right to choose who touches our body. Whatever someone offers in exchange, if we do not want something, then we do not want it, and that’s that.
- If someone does not believe us or tells us that they will help us, but does not do anything, we can insist or talk to another person. As long as the uncomfortable situation goes on, we can continue talking about it!
• Distinguish between a comfortable secret (that I enjoy) and an uncomfortable secret (I don’t feel alright with this secret, or someone hurts me and asks me not to tell anyone). If we keep an uncomfortable secret, it is like a poison and can make us sick. Therefore it is better to tell a person of trust rather than keeping the secret.
• The facilitator can provide concrete elements for helping the girls* to identify their person of trust: people who believe us and who can really do something about it so that the situation stops and does not repeat itself. Often adults are the ones who can stop a situation. But sometimes when we need help, we can talk to a friend or with our magical animal or practice in our head talking about it. It can be helpful to talk to a friend before talking with an adult, and the friend can help us afterwards, for example she can tell her parents. If we need help, we can call a special phone number where people are trained to talk with children about this kind of thing.
• Sexuality, cuddling and kissing is not something bad. But it is important that everyone agrees with what happens, and Sarah does not seem to agree. And when we do not agree with something, we can say so to make it stop.
• The facilitator can also question the reasons for the uncle’s behaviour. We may not always know why the uncle does what he is doing, but it is certain that the uncle KNOWS that he does not have the right to do it. All adults know that it is not allowed to touch children’s intimate parts. Nobody has the right to touch our intimate parts, except for healing us, and even then we can say no.

Overview:
The girls* read the strips and discuss them. Then they discuss different reactions for these situations.

Objectives:
Distinguishing between a comfortable and uncomfortable secret
Identifying different types of violence
Co-construction of knowledge
Recognising a trusted adult
Knowing about support organisations
Making the link with participants’ experiences

Materials:
Comic strips

Sequence:
The girls* form groups of three or four. Each group reads a comic strip and answers the following questions:
• What is the problem in this story?
• How does the girl* react?
• What would you do in her place or that of another person in the comic? Would you act differently today?
When they have finished the small-group discussion, the group comes together and each small group shares their answers. The facilitator asks questions, completes, asks how the girls* are feeling.

Key messages:
• We decide what we do with our bodies. The respect of our body is unconditional. We have the right to choose if we want our body to be touched and by whom. Whatever someone offers in exchange, if we do not want something, then we do not want it, and that’s that!
• If someone does not believe us or tells us that they will help us, but does not do anything, we can insist or talk to another person. As long as the uncomfortable situation goes on, we can continue talking about it.
• We are free to do what we want with our bodies. It is great to explore our sexuality, but we decide what we want to do and when, nobody can force us. When someone tries to force us, we have the right to defend ourselves – this is legal self-defence.
• Distinguishing between a comfortable secret (that I enjoy) and an uncomfortable secret (I don’t feel alright with this secret, or someone hurts me and asks me not to tell anyone). If we keep an uncomfortable secret, it is like a poison and can make us sick. Therefore it is better to tell a person of trust rather than keeping the secret.
• The facilitator can provide concrete elements for helping the girls* to identify their person of trust: people who believe us and who can really do something about it so that the situation stops and does not repeat itself. Often adults are the ones who can stop a situation. But sometimes when we need help, we can talk to a friend or with our magical animal or practice in our head talking about it. It can be helpful to talk with a friend so that she can help us in getting help. There are helplines and support organisations that we can call, and some of them have a chat if we do not feel comfortable with talking on the phone. Cyberharassment is serious. We can talk about it and report it.
• If we see someone getting bullied, let’s not keep silent and let’s show solidarity, even if we are afraid. Even if sometimes we feel alone, we are not alone. We can act collectively with our friends.
• When acting as a bystander, it is important to speak for oneself and not instead of the person concerned in the first place. We have to make sure that our reaction meets the need of the person we support.
• The facilitator can be questioned about the reasons for violence. It is important to make girls* and young women* understand that power dynamics of domination lead men and boys to violent behaviour. Being violent is often a way of enjoying other people’s distress, even if it is always more complicated than that.
Introduction to physical defence

1 - 2 - 3 Emotion
12 years and older
15 min.

Overview:
On the model of 1-2-3 Stop (see p. 54), instead of calling stop when turning around, the girl against the wall indicates an emotion or an attitude, e.g. “joy,” “angry,” “aloof”... The other girls have to mime the emotion or attitude without moving. Those who laugh or move while the first girl is watching them have to return to the starting line.

Objectives:
- Working on body language
- Learning to maintain a facial expression
- Getting comfortable with “ridiculousness”
- Group cohesion

Yell of power
12 years and older
30 min.

Overview:
The facilitator shows how to root the voice in the body to avoid hurting the throat and have the power to yell.

Objectives:
- Being aware of one’s voice
- Learning to yell without hurting oneself
- Being aware of one’s inner power
- Learning a simple self-defence technique

Sequence:
1. Warm-up: The group stands in a circle. Everyone massages their face, patting it with the fingertips and then massaging it in circles with the palms. Then the facilitator demonstrates several exercises inspired by facial yoga to playfully warm up the facial muscles. For example, the rat: all the face points forwards making a pointy snout, count until two and then the face draws backwards as if we drove in an open convertible; the tortoise: squat and smile upside-down; the lion (see images). Then the warm-up of the vocal cords follows. The facilitator shows and the group imitates: the noise of a worried dog (closed mouth), whistles, sirens or talking like a chatelaine (like having a hot potato in the mouth). Finnish with yawning and stretching.
2. Breathing: The facilitator explains that the voice stems from the breath that our lungs send up to make the vocal cords vibrate. All participants adopt the stable stance, legs apart at shoulder width, knees slightly bent and shoulders relaxed and lowered. Put a hand on the belly to feel the breathing. Concentrate on your breathing and feel again how you are grounded and roots are growing under your feet (see p. 46). Breathe in and inflate the belly without moving the shoulders. Then, breathe out imagining that you blow out the candles on a birthday cake. The breath is controlled, long and intensive at the same time, without being too strong.
3. The yell: Once we have understood our breathing, we can make a series of shouts to reach the yell of power. For starters, breathe in and say ball as if you want to surprise someone for laughs. Then the facilitator demonstrates the monster scream and the girls imitate it. The monster scream consists in breathing out like for the birthday candles, but making the vocal cords vibrate without searching for a particular sound. It is important to open the mouth as wide as possible. Finally, the facilitator explains that the yell of power is a yell that gives courage, that allows us to get rid of adrenaline, that “makes us feel good.” Yelling alerts other people that we are in danger. It consists of all the elements seen up to now together and to yell louder and shorter, with the mouth wide open (“aaaaah”). The facilitator demonstrates and the girls imitate. At the end of working on the voice, it is important to hydrate the vocal cords to avoid damage.
4. Little yelling games:
   - The wall of sound: One girl stands on one side of the room, another on the other side, and the rest of the group forms the wall of sound in the middle. Girl A has to get a message to girl B that B has to understand, while the wall of sound makes as much noise as possible to drown A’s message.
   - Yelling escalation: A stands in front of B, A says yes, B answers no. They start out quietly and speak louder and louder until both are full out yelling, then they gradually reduce the volume until they are again whispering.
   - The yell of the pack: the group stands in a circle and holds hands, as far as possible from each other. They make themselves small starting with a small sound, then go towards the center straightening and lifting their hands, letting the voice out (like an ola towards the middle of the circle).
Sequence of activities

This is a possible empowerment and violence prevention workshop for 14- to 16-year-old girls (4h30).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 min</td>
<td>The name game</td>
<td>First contact between participants, Getting into movement, Liberating energy and beginner’s stress, Recalling the names</td>
<td>Stuffed toy or foam ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 min</td>
<td>Time’s up! Strategies</td>
<td>Co-construction of knowledge, Multitude of possible reactions, Validate and share individual resources, Trust and group cohesion, Overcome isolation by sharing experiences</td>
<td>Sticky notes, Strategy posters, Erasable marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 min</td>
<td>Crocodile and warriors</td>
<td>First contact between participants, Getting into movement, Creating relationships between participants, Addressing first notions of self-defence (grounding and solidarity), Experiencing a solid stance</td>
<td>A judo mat, chalk or duct tape to mark off an “island”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 min</td>
<td>The hot chair</td>
<td>Becoming aware of boundary transgressions, Tackling the concept of consent, Learning to say no, Experiencing discomfort in a paradoxical situation</td>
<td>1 chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 min</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 min</td>
<td>1-2-3 Emotion</td>
<td>Working on body language, Learning to maintain a facial expression, Getting comfortable with “ridiculousness,” Group cohesion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 min</td>
<td>Comics on sexist violence</td>
<td>Distinguishing between a comfortable and uncomfortable secret, Identifying different types of violence, Co-construction of knowledge, Recognising a trusted adult, Knowing about support organisations, Making the link with participants’ experiences</td>
<td>Comic strips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 min</td>
<td>Yell of power</td>
<td>Being aware of one’s voice, Learning to yell without hurting oneself, Being aware of one’s inner power, Learning a simple self-defence technique</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 min</td>
<td>Feedback on the workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Boundary exercise**

1. Walking around the room without touching; when participants meet they look firmly at each other. Then they add a gesture, all while keeping moving about without touching.
2. In two lines, add voice.
3. If the “stop” is not convincing, B continues advancing until the second “stop.”

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**Piss off**

The girls stand on two lines a couple of metres apart, face to face. On the facilitator’s signal, the two lines walk towards the centre. When two girls meet in the middle at about 1m distance, they stop, look into each others eyes and, with serious body language, tell their partner “piss off,” “get lost,” “f*ck off”... The first to laugh has lost! Change partners and start again.

---

**Boundary exercise**

- Being aware of personal boundaries
- Identifying importance of body language
- Practicing boundary setting

---

**Piss off**

- Experiencing assertive body language
- Keeping a straight face when setting one’s boundaries
- Learning boundary setting
- Group cohesion

---

**Boundary exercise**

- Being aware of personal boundaries
- Identifying importance of body language
- Practicing boundary setting

---

**Piss off**

- Experiencing assertive body language
- Keeping a straight face when setting one’s boundaries
- Learning boundary setting
- Group cohesion
Empowerment as an Everyday Action Principle
In the previous chapters, we have seen that prevention of violence is central to the empowerment of girls* and young women*. Violence limits, or even destroys, girls’ possibilities to experience freedom, responsibilities and autonomy. One way of letting them gain more autonomy is to organise activities in violence prevention (see chapter 4) and feminist self-defence. We also consider empowerment as a guiding principle for the everyday actions of girls* and young women*. This allows girls* to be actors of their own agency development by and for themselves. In this perspective, our role as trainers, educators and facilitators consists not in being the underliners of autonomy, but to accompany them in a safe and reassuring way to experience empowerment and violence prevention through activities that are indirectly linked. In the steps of Paulo Freire, the idea is to develop agency through violence prevention, by means of situations that are “present, concrete and reflective of people’s aspirations” (Freire 1974: p. 46). Each moment of life is an opportunity to experience autonomy and the “power with” so that empowerment can take its roots in girls’* and young women’s* reality. In this way, they can modify their behaviour, interactions and habits to gain freedom.

### 5.1 Prevention of violence as an everyday and continuous practice in ordinary activities of youth organisations

Empowerment can take many forms. In this section, we are interested in the prevention of gender-based violence by proposing a pedagogical approach to integrate violence prevention in the actions, practices and regular everyday activities of girls* and young women*. Empowerment is an action principle that allows to combat all forms of violence that limit freedom and reduce capability to make decisions by and for oneself. Centering empowerment in our educational and pedagogical practices assures the transition from a situation of vulnerability to a context of autonomy and emancipation by the means of transformation and learning opportunities (Chamberland 2014). These learning opportunities do not have to be clearly defined; on the contrary, participants will remember the provided information better if the knowledge stems from concrete experiences to which they can relate. By changing our approach as youth workers, we can reposition the transfer of information and knowledge (Ogden & Laugier 2014). Any activity or interaction with a participant can be considered a moment for developing agency, empowerment and violence prevention. Empowerment actions are not an objective in their own right, but are rather a means to reach the objectives. The means are as important as the goal. For example, if the objective is to learn how to set one’s boundaries, the didactical means should support and exemplify boundary setting. Tools and techniques are created for giving substance to agency and thinking by and for all girls*. The mission of empowerment in a feminist perspective is to not only act on a specific problem, but to change, at the end of the day, the underlying power relations. Otherwise, we risk to switch to a neoliberal concept of empowerment that is centred only on individuals and not on the transformation of society for the empowerment of girls* and young women*.

Leading collective action in the name of prevention of violence means to weaken powerlessness with regard to gender inequality.

We plan an educational and pedagogical approach where empowerment is a principle of action, experience is the best vector for knowledge. Contrary to the “banking model of education” (Freire 1974) where information is transferred from the educating person to the learning person, building knowledge from experience allows to anchor knowledge and to access it more easily and automatically.

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18. Contrary to girls*, a term referring to motor and intellectual abilities, ‘consentency’ refers to feeling capable while being conscious of one’s limits, independent of the abilities in question.

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Past violence or feeling unsafe increase the vulnerability of girls* and young women* and limit their capabilities for spatial and social mobility. When they are confronted with regular violence, they may have strong feelings of powerlessness. Powerlessness defines a deterioration of agency. It appears when our body is subject to huge stress, without the means to fight or to flee (Le Bossé 2015). The body, and more particularly the brain, has three reaction modes for stress: flight, fight or freezing (paralysis, absence of action). Freezing particularly blocks our functional action system which has no other solution than to “play dead” (Contamin 2017). When this mechanical body reaction repeats itself regularly, agency is destroyed and the individual experiences difficulties to anticipate and plan for a more or less near future. According to Le Bossé (2016), one way of counteracting powerlessness is to be in action. Therefore, it is important to put action at the centre of our practice of transmission and facilitation.

Our role as facilitators includes restoring movement so that girls* and young women* can reconnect with an active (re)possession of power, control their decisions of what is important for them, for their loved ones and their community (Israel et al. 1994). Control is the capacity to regulate individual or collective actions in a given context (Le Bossé 2015).

In order to restore movement, we can create opportunities to experience violence prevention via present and concrete learning situations. In these situations, a dialogue with girls* and young women* can be established. It can be completely informal moments, like a meal or a walk. Dialogue is a central tool (Freire 1974). It needs mental availability and focus because these moments are often unexpected or provoked by the feedback on a lived experience. We have to be prepared without waiting for them. Dialogue is a way to know about girls* living situations, to see how they name violence and how they experience it. It allows to understand their perceptions of themselves and the world. Dialogue offers opportunities for interaction where girls* and young women* can practice less to adults’ supposed social role expectations (Goffman 1973). Dialogue provides access to their perceptions so that we can deconstruct their stereotypes while respecting their vision of the world. It allows us to raise their awareness of violence and to develop their critical thinking.

### 5.2 Between power and responsibility: how to overcome the contradictions of empowerment as a youth worker

Chapter 3 pointed out several paradoxes or challenges in empowerment education and feminist self-defence for girls*: 1/ the tension of material, affective and moral dependency and autonomy; 2/ consideration of the whole person still in construction; 3/ the ambivalence of the facilitators’ partiality; 4/ the coherence between responsibility and freedom to act. To succeed, any project of empowerment needs to rigorously analyse these paradoxes to avoid fatalism (nothing will ever change) and powerlessness (I’ll never be able to do anything). Indeed, several empowerment projects have ended up with results far from autonomy, for example, when the needs of the beneficiaries do not coincide with the objectives and expected results of the project leaders. Good intentions do not suffice to develop sustainable projects focussed on the beneficiaries’ needs. What is needed is that the girls* have a real possibility to become aware of their situation and define the desired changes. Then they need the material means to implement those changes. When working with adolescents, we are confronted with a similar paradox: how can we help them to become freer and more autonomous while we are responsible for them, and giving them freedom could expose them to danger? What should we do when our pedagogical ambitions do not correspond to the girls’* wishes? How can we be sure that they will use the tools we shared with them?
First of all, to shed light on the individual and structural constraints that keep people in powerless situations (Le Bossé 2015) has to be at the center. If we do not want to maintain girls* in a situation of failure, we have to be aware of the context in which they live. Setting one’s boundaries, confrontation or physical defence depend not only on the girls’* intentions. Otherwise, we risk to hand them the responsibility for any aggression, blaming them and reinforcing their feeling of powerlessness. It is not only a question of skills, it is not enough to know self-defence tools to avoid violence or overcome one’s social position. There is always a context and a structure in which our actions take place. Girls* control some aspects of their lives, but there are domain over which they have no (or very little) control. The context can be structurally very hard and incapacitating when sexism is too strong; when poverty limits the possibilities to do what one wants or needs; when the racist social climate reduces us time and again to secondary roles. Girls’* first preoccupation is not necessarily to learn to defend themselves, but to know if their parents will find work again to pay the rent. To develop girls* and young women’s* agency and autonomy is a question not only of tools and techniques, but of the social context. Empowering girls* goes together with a larger struggle against inequalities and asymmetric power relations so that they have decent living conditions.

When we want to implement action based on the principle of empowerment, we need to analyse the influence of social issues and girls’* individual characteristics. According to Vallère and Le Bossé (2006), “the effective exercise of agency depends at the same time on the opportunities the environment offers (legal framework, political context, resources etc.) and the capacity for individuals to exercise power (skills, wish to act, perception of action opportunities etc.).” (Vallère & Le Bossé 2006: p. 89) In our pedagogical approach, we have to articulate violence prevention actions with the situations in which they take place. In order to complete an action, structural and institutional issues need to be tackled. The success of a violence prevention project depends not only on the quality of the activities, but also on their general context.

Secondly, our pedagogical approach should not give the girls* the illusion that they have decisional power in all aspects of a project or action. It is important to explicitly address the constraints in which we have to operate and to match them with coherent forms of participation. There are four levels of participation: 1/ information (the girls* can ask questions about a decision, but the decision cannot be disputed); 2/ consultation (the girls* can express their opinions, and the decision-makers take them into account as well as possible and ultimately are the only ones to decide); 3/ dialogue or negotiation (a debate with the objective of finding a compromise, but the final decision does not lies with the girls*); 4/ co-decision-making (the girls* participate in the decision-making).

Each level of participation can be divided into different forms depending on the decision type. There can also be different phases of participation throughout the project. 12 to 22 year olds are particularly sensitive and reactive to injustice, because it often puts them in a situation of powerlessness. When they see that adults promise them participation in the entire development of an activity or all decisions on community life in the youth centre and this is not the actual case, they may feel betrayed. Again, if we are not clear about the level and scope of participation in decision making and in the implementation of a project or activity, this may increase their feeling of powerlessness, which, in turn, risks decreasing their adherence to the project or causing a lack of motivation and interest in empowerment activities. Girls* need transparency to understand the material and financial constraints of their youth organisations.

We have seen that girls* need boundaries and reference points throughout their development (chapters 2 and 4) which evolve with time and in function of their maturity and needs. As youth workers, we need to adapt to their double and sometimes contradictory demand for protection and freedom at the same moment. Clear ground rules (including self-respect) that are applied as well as possible are one way of guaranteeing moral and affective security. We can think with them about the consequences if the ground rules are not respected. They need to rub against boundaries to become adults.

To find a middle ground, youth workers have to start from the analysis of perceptions of girls* and young women* For the participants to be able to empower themselves, youth workers need to safeguard the project’s feasibility while leaving the girls* the necessary space to reflect on and determine the terms of the proposed activities. The expertise of trainers, educators and facilitators and the girls’* expertise are complementary and do not always concern the same aspects of a project.

5.3 Integrating violence prevention in empowerment projects and activities in youth organisations

Empowerment can be studied under several interlinked axes: “developing consciousness of the self, self-esteem, critical consciousness and individual skills with commitment, mobilisation and collective action for social transformation” (Bacqué & Biewener 2015: p. 54). Below are several possibilities of what to do with girls* and young women* to implement a project based on the principle of empowerment.

Fostering girls* spaces

The success of empowerment is based on a first step, the awareness of power relations. The process of awareness is slow and complex and is opposed to victimisation and paternalism (De Lépinay 2018). It is based on a dialogue between persons directly concerned by the problem, i.e. the sharing of experiences and, by becoming aware of the banality of certain forms of violence, overcoming individualising perspectives of violence to replace them with an emerging shared perspective. This is only possible in girls’* groups. It is necessary to create more girls’* spaces to establish relations of trust between the girls* and young women*. Girls’* youth organisations are a prerequisite for creating the conditions of knowledge rooted in the experience of discrimination. Girls* and young women* need to feel free to express themselves and their disagreements without harming their cause, to have healthy and constructive conflicts. Girls’* spaces are an important tool to reduce the self-censure that often impacts girls* and young women’s* choices and expressions. It creates a safer space that allows them to feel free to be themselves, to talk about topics that are relevant to them, in particular their bodies or their sexualities, and to dare seeking experiences that they would not be able to have in other contexts, such as exploring shared oppression and how to resist it. Meeting with other people concerned by the same oppression strengthens self-confidence. Girls* and young women* are educated and socialised to care for the people around them, to not hurt or disappoint others, even if that means to forget themselves, neglect their boundaries and exhaust themselves. Those ‘others’ are in particular boys and men. Therefore, girls’* spaces remove one constraining dimension of their freedom. Girls’* spaces are not a political end, but an emancipation tool of feminin and antiracist struggles.

Foster peer education

Peer education is an approach where girls* and young women* transfer knowledge and knowhow among themselves, without adult intervention. It includes a dimension of responsibility: the more experienced and/or the older ones are responsible for the other group members. Peer
education fosters responsibility and the taking of initiative. It provides an opportunity to each girl* to share her passions and knowledge and to put her skills at the service of the group or collective. For violence prevention, the knowledge and knowhow emerges from their lived experiences. The facilitator is not the only guardian of knowledge. Peer education allows girls* and young women* to develop individual and collective strategies for protection and defence. It also provides a place for each girl* within the group or collective and to overcome the isolation that results from violence.

Seize any learning opportunity

If we consider empowerment as a principle for action in everyday activities, any situation can be an opportunity to foster self-esteem and self-confidence. We can seize on innocuous moments to do violence prevention. In accordance with what the girls* want to do or share, we can bring them to think about violence prevention. In this way, empowerment is anchored in concrete situations and starts from their situated experiences. It makes visible what girls* and young women* know already, but often don’t know that they know. Addressing prevention violence through everyday experiences puts them in situations of success and validates their knowhow, not by telling them "you can do it", but by validating their words or actions. The same context of action mobilises and links theory and practice. This establishes a link between our pedagogical objectives (developing their agency and autonomy) and their experience during the activity. Empowerment is a path that continuously creates new habits to reclaim control. For negotiation or co-decision processes to be at the centre of collective awareness raising and the recovery of self-confidence and self-esteem, we need to be able to accept contradiction, disagreement and conflict. Girls* and young women* need to experience boundaries and construct lines of reasoning in and by contradiction. Therefore conflict may be the mediator that creates safety, on the condition that it remains healthy and constructive. Conflict can also regulate the sometimes overflowing emotions of participants.

This approach demands to trust in the participants' agency and in the direction they will give to the events. It trusts their collective intelligence and its practical application. It requires the respect and recognition of their perceptions of the world as valid, even if they are far from ours.

Create success situations and celebrate success

Empowerment as a principle that organises girls* actions allows to seize ordinary occasions to develop knowledge. For example, the concrete situations on which we build should never engender actions or goals that undermine the participant. It is important to create situations of success and not of failure to avoid triggering the girls’* feeling of powerlessness. Girls* and young women* are invited to take responsibilities and to share their knowledge and knowhow with their peers, but always at a level that meets their abilities. Every progress, each grain of self-confidence gained, each initiative that leads to success should be celebrated. It is important to identify and highlight successes, even the small ones. For hooks (2003), love, care, joy and hope are fundamental factors of agency and the power to act that compose empowerment. What could implement them better than a party?

Making one’s actions public

The concept of empowerment has a strong potential for individual and collective change. Therefore it’s important to advertise the implemented actions to disseminate practices and give hope of a world where women* and girls* are strong, free and independent. Publicising empowerment activities allows girls* to be proud of themselves, to receive recognition and to gain resources. The following example shows how empowerment education can subtly integrate violence prevention and communication without disrupting the girls’* decision-making processes and action.

Bicycle workshop

The girls* in the girls’ centre want to do a bicycle tour during the holidays. This is a fantastic learning opportunity for empowerment! The facilitator asks for their input, warning them that not all their ideas can be put into practice because there are certain safety rules to be respected (participation level = negotiation). They start writing down what they will need for a positive experience: having breaks, being autonomous without youth workers, being able to repair their bicycle in case of problems, adapting to the rhythm of the slowest girl* in the group, avoiding a climate of competition… This is the starting point for the youth workers to propose workshops where those who know how to repair bicycles teach the others. If no girl* has any knowledge of bicycle repairs, the youth worker can show them how to become autonomous for small repairs. In another workshop, girls* knowing how to read maps teach the others to recognize inclinations, road types, distances… In order to develop an itinerary that matches the chosen difficulty level and that everyone can lead by map once they are on the road.

The youth worker can authorise the outing without supervision, but can share her worries: she knows about women* cyclists having been harassed and asks what the girls* can do to prevent this from happening or how to react to defend themselves. This allows to address violence prevention in a concrete context. The girls* may choose to make signs or small flags with anti-sexist slogans to feel stronger together and to personalise the youth centre’s bicycles.

Feedback moments can be planned beforehand. These moments are the occasion to evaluate the execution of the bicycle tour and eventual problems that arose. If a slower girl* was several times alone at the end of the group, she can use verbal self-defence techniques to express her displeasure and to avoid repetition. The others can become aware that their behaviour has affected a group member.

Lastly, the bicycle tour can finish with a party and a meal to celebrate that everything went well and the eventual problems have been overcome. If the girls’ centre is on social media, it is also possible to share the experience with accompanying photos and a short text, all while respecting the image rights of each participant. In this way, the bicycle tour is not a goal to be achieved in itself, but a means to achieve the objective of empowerment and violence prevention.
6 Conclusion
In this manual, we have seen how feminist self-defence, and more generally violence prevention, is linked to the principle of empowerment. One of the foremost challenges of feminist self-defence is to increase the agency of people excluded or marginalized due to their gender or other, intersecting systems of oppression. The project has the larger ambition to combat systems of power and domination that maintain people in vulnerability. Feminist self-defence as a practice aims to empower women* and girls* to defend themselves without the help of a third party, mostly men. It is not only about aggression management. Feminist self-defence makes women* and girls* generally safer by deconstructing the myths underlying rape culture. It allows participants to reclaim emotions such as fear or anger to transform them into tools for the exploration of their personal boundaries. Feminist self-defence activities give girls*, women* and gender minorities the opportunity to experience their strength and power and to regain confidence in their own abilities. This practice raises awareness of all the actions that women* and girls* deploy already to keep safe. Validating these strategies is an efficient means to foster self-confidence and self-esteem. Feminist self-defence, therefore, is a practical application of empowerment.

The transfer of tools for the prevention of gender-based violence against girls* and young women* comprises additional issues. Their needs and their modes of learning evolve throughout their development. We cannot use the same tools with 13-year-old girls* as with 20-year-old young women*. In addition, we have to take into account possible language barriers and learning disabilities. Based on the psychosocial functioning of young girls* and young women*, we can develop activities that match their needs and realities. Violence prevention has several objectives. It allows to grasp many strategies that can be used in a situation of danger or insecurity. Feminist self-defence values what girls* and young women* know and do already, often without realizing it and addresses a whole range of possible actions for setting boundaries and leaving risky situations by listening to their intuition. Other activities show the importance of setting boundaries, using one's body language and voice effectively. Different teaching aids help to reflect what can be done in concrete situations to stop violence. To implement those activities and adapt them to girls* and young women's* psychosocial needs, youth workers have to analyze how different discriminations interplay in the girls* lives. Although the activities in this manual are mostly centered on the prevention of gender-based violence, they concern all girls*, regardless of their skin colour, ethnic and cultural origins, social class, builds, sexualities and motor skills. This educational and pedagogical approach constructs critical knowledge and consciousness through the promotion of freedom on the basis of a relationship with knowledge that does not rely on exercising power (Hedjerassi 2016).

The strength of this project is to empower girls* and young women*, but also to redefine empowerment-centred approach that each educator, facilitator or trainer can use. Empowerment is a concept that emerged in the 1970s, like the analyses of Freire or Ainsley (Barzú mé & Biewer 2015). Both aimed at giving power back to oppressed or marginalized people. In Europe, they have been forgotten for several years, but surfaced again recently. The concept has a similar history as on other continents, even if the European definitions have been more restrictive, such as lifelong learning. But all these approaches aim at empowering people ‘without voice’. Lifelong learning is losing ground and faces a crisis of commitment due to the neoliberal and capitalist contexts. Empowerment does not escape a liberal redefinition based on personal development, as well as the ability to take initiative and responsibility. Today, the concept is used in neoliberal management techniques that do not aim to develop the individual and collective agency in a critical perspective or to raise awareness of violence against oppressed people. This is why it is essential for us to define the concept in relation to violence prevention, in a feminist and committed perspective.
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