

# Why doesn't Mona Lisa smile?

Renate Seebauer

Burgenland House of Europe, Austria

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## Part 1: Practical Guidance and Didactical Approach

### Background and keywords:

Body positions, gestures (e.g. meaning expressed by the position of one's arms or the way of holding one's head, ...), distance behaviour and signs of relationship (relative proportions, holding tight and being held tight, ...), often reveal more about a person than what the speaker is actually saying (i.e. the utterances of the speaker or what is verbalized). "Typical male/typical female" characteristics of non-verbal communication are also evident. Many examples of this can be found in advertisements from the clothing industry. Advertising flyers (direct mail advertisements), fashion journals and pictures are ideal materials for analyzing and raising an awareness of messages related to body language.

Keywords: Gender-specific non-verbal behaviour; implicit messages from nonverbal communication.

### Similar topics:

See keywords

### Materials:

- Brochures containing advertisements from the clothing industry, fashion journals for making the collage;
- Scissors;
- Glue;
- Packaging paper or cardboard of 40x50;
- 4 boxes.

### Duration:

Two class sessions (if no follow-up activities)

### Number of participants:

10 or more children; ideal with classes of up to 24 – 26 children

### Age:

11 years of age and upwards (i.e. 5th grade), in class, afternoon supervision, youth activities.

### Aims:

- To promote practical creativity skills and increase an awareness for conscious observation and recognition of nonverbal messages;
- To provide a change-in-pace from a more standardized approach, by making collages and spontaneously combining typical male/female forms of nonverbal communication;

- To encourage the desire for an increased awareness of reality; to promote creativity, imagination and spontaneity;
- Ideal for project-oriented work in art classes, German or mother tongue language instruction, multimedia classes; *Doing Gender*.

### (Short) Explanation:

#### Steps:

1. To make *this exercise more stimulating*, select a famous painting to which collage transformations can be made (i.e. replacing the head, exchanging heads: male – female and starting all over again, ...). The Internet and image processing programmes offer many possibilities for this.

The portrait of "Mona Lisa" (also known as La Gioconda by Leonardo da Vinci; was painted during the period between 1503 and 1505) and the "Self-portrait in a Fur Coat („Selbstbildnis im Pelzrock") by Albrecht Dürer (1500) is provided as a suggestion for the purpose of this example (cf. below).



"What does not go together here?"

The children can see that a man would never place his hands like in the modified middle picture of "Mona Lisa".

2. Are there typical male/female ways of

- placing arms/hands;
- of sitting, positioning legs;
- holding one's head, ...?

Raise awareness in class discussions about the following points:

How do boys/men and girls/women position their arms/hands in fashion shows?

How do they position their legs? When they are sitting? When they are standing?

How do they hold their head?

Analyze the advertising brochure in pair work.

The results can be presented in a table, prepared in advance, such as the one below.

Lastly, findings can be discussed and compared.

How are "masculinity" and "femininity" represented in our advertising brochures?		
	Typically masculine	Typically feminine
1. Arms/ Hands		
2. Position of legs (sitting, standing)		
3. Way of holding head		

3. Boy or girl? – Man or woman? Make a collage in pairs

- First, the children cut out pictures of males and females (as much as possible of the same size) from the brochures that they have brought with them and then they cut the pictures of the persons roughly in half (i.e. across their waistlines).
- Then all of the "male and female" upper bodies are placed in two boxes. Likewise the "male and female lower bodies" are placed in two other boxes.
- Each pairs selects at least five "male and/or female upper bodies" and five "female and/or male lower bodies".
- Next, the figures will be reassembled (e.g. a male upper body with a female lower body or the exact opposite).
- In preparation for discussions planned for phase 2, have the students undertake tasks involving finding and choosing, grouping, exchanging, combining, building and again destroying.
- The individual collages will be hung up next to each other and discussed.

**Variations (continuation):**

For the "shadow pictures" lesson (cf. Mühlen Achs, 1998, p. 135f.) – which can be continued in "physical education" or in "drama class" – a source of light and technical equipment (i.e. a screen) is required.

Actors act in the area in-between the source of light and the screen. The rest of the group gathers in front of the screen and observes the activities that are shown as shadow pictures.

Through body positions and movements, the actors act out the following:

- I am strong/weak;
- I am angry/sad;
- I am proud/anxious; ...

Also, the targets, "I am a girl/a boy"; "I am a woman/a man" can be interpreted by means of body-language.

- What is the original meaning behind gender rituals?
- What meaning do they really convey?

**Reflection:**

The information processing focuses on "messages", which transmit specifically male or female forms of nonverbal communication (standing with legs wide apart; crossing legs; arms spread out or straight down at sides, position of hands; pointing index finger; head

slanted off to the side; looking downwards, looking far off to the distance, ... of "Theoretical Part").

## Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information

### Body language– female stereotype, male stereotype

Body language has many facets and is never silent. It involves the entire body, gestures, facial expression, eye contact, posture, our way of moving, use of space and manner of speaking, ... and conveys about two-thirds of all relevant social information, such as feeling, social status, self-image, sex – in the sense of gender, and is deeply rooted in society as well as the individual himself/herself (cf. Mühlen Achs 1993, 7f., 56).

Gender-specific body language results in the development of a gender culture which has an effect on all social interactions.

The manner of expression appears to be natural and it is not realised that it is not the character itself but only the isolated signals, subject to the respective situation, sent by the acting person and sensed by the observer, that are considered important. Mühlen Achs (1993) points out that "the image of mankind in the media" due to "its striking stereotypes and curtain-fire-like presence" leads to an "evidence-goldmine" "in order to prove the leadership-function of the gender-specific body language". Mühlen Achs 1993, p.59).



*"The big brother" – Who affects (protects) whom?*

Source: Steffl Trend Letter, 05/07

Postwurfsendung (Direct mail advertisement) 23. Nov. 2007, p. 7.

Mühlen Achs (1993) draws a distinction between "body coding" (simply the outward appearance) and "Genderlect" (i.e. viewing masculine and feminine styles of discourse as two distinct cultural dialects, ...) The standards about how women and men have to look and dress, reinforce the existing gender gap tendencies, which are mainly based on the cult of the beautiful and stereotypes about males and females.

### The dress code

The dress code refers to the power definition of clothes. People are categorized and are or can be judged on the basis of their clothes. For men, clothes symbolically represent position, status, prosperity and masculinity; for women, first of all, their female attractiveness should be emphasized (often figure-hugging, revealing, and to some extent, uncomfortable and unhealthy such as high heels. Power and status are not symbolized.

### Ideal body

The ideal body actually refers to the figure itself, not least of all because dress codes have increasingly softened. An almost unattainable ideal of beauty idea leads women to be permanently occupied with their bodies as well as unsatisfied with them and this thus negatively affects the core of a woman's identity. The ideal is often described as a lack of energy, strength, sovereignty, dominance, ... and is often defined from a male point of view (stylists, fashion designers, editors, ... and partner). The ideal male body is based on male qualities developed by the men themselves. They often joke themselves about their own shortcomings (beer belly, going bold, ...) and they are categorized on the basis of other qualities (professional or personal abilities, status, ...).

### Size relation

A woman has to be smaller than a man – giving her no chance to challenge the balance of power. By symbolically making herself smaller (head submissively/meekly tilting one's head, looking up to someone, bending of the body and squirming) her hierarchical inferiority is emphasized.



*"The big school classmate watches out (for her)."*

### Use of space

Male behaviour is characterized by freedom of movement, they claim more space in a room and symbolically occupy territory. They are more relaxed and adopt a casual posture, in contrast to a woman who has a space-minimizing behaviour, closes herself in and minimizes the energy-binding attitude of women. Also, dealings with women in public correspond to hierarchical behaviour whereby women always occupy the inferior position. Contact privileges remain the prerogative of a man. A woman may however have contact with a man, but purely of a nurturing nature, or to admire him or to support him.



*"He controls the territory and determines who gets into the car"*

Source: Peek&Cloppenburg,

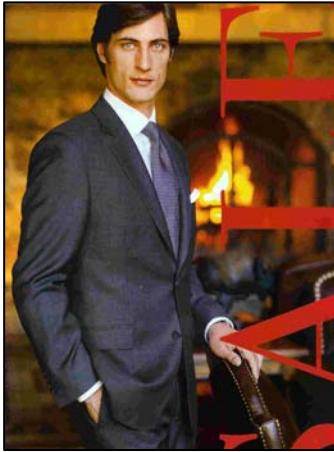
Postwurfsendung (Direct mail advertisement) of 21 Nov. 2007, p. 1.

### Gestures

Male gestures are clear, decisive, insistent and competition-oriented. Power signals (a pointing index finger, a clenched fist – threatening or as a sign of victory in sports – and obscene gestures) are used. A man does not touch himself gently, but energetically and purposefully. Often women fiddle around with themselves (touching themselves i.e. smoothing out their clothes, fiddling with their hair; nervously moving their hands, clasping their knees, ...). Their behaviour is gentle, discreet and non-aggressive. Protruding one's throat as a gesture of submission is mainly practiced by women.

### Eye contact

Only men are allowed to stare (distancing, represents power). If a woman stares, then often the eye contact is taken to mean an (erotic) interest. Only men can get away with avoiding eye contact as a show of their position of power. (a high ranking person in the hierarchy). Otherwise, it is only a sign of submissiveness. In contrast, a look of admiration is typically feminine: gazing at a man in rapt attention, smiling, nodding in agreement, ...



*"Power and submission"*

← Source: Peek&Cloppenburg,  
Postwurfsendung (Direct mail  
advertisement) of 5 Dec. 2007, p. 1.

Source: Peek&Cloppenburg, →  
Postwurfsendung (Direct mail  
advertisement) of 1 Dec. 2007, p. 9.



### Facial expressions

Facial Expression conveys emotions as well as status and dominance. Stereotyped facial expressions control emotions (i.e. weaknesses, hurt feelings, mental anguish) by neutralizing them or hiding them. Masculine charisma is also achieved through rigorous self-control (raising one's eyebrow, eyes narrow, small mouth, positive stress, concentration, ...). Courteous friendliness is expected from women. They achieve this by nodding in agreement and constantly smiling, however not arrogantly, nor full of reproach nor superiority, but in an approving, encouraging, embarrassed, apologetic or sad manner, ...

### **Bibliography and List of Sources:**

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**Worksheet 1:**

**„Mona Lisa“ (Leonardo Da Vinci)**

**„Selbstbildnis im Pelzrock“ (Albrecht Dürer)**



**What does not go together here?"**

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**Are there typical male/female ways of placing arms/hands?**

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**Are there typical male/female ways of sitting, positioning legs?**

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**Are there typical male/female ways of holding one's head?**

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**Worksheet 2:**

**Analyze the advertising brochure in pair work**

<b>How are "masculinity" and "femininity" represented in our advertising brochures?</b>		
	<b>Typically masculine</b>	<b>Typically feminine</b>
<b>Arms</b>		
<b>Hands</b>		
<b>Position of legs</b> - sitting		
- standing		
<b>Way of holding head</b>		