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## RE-VISITING EQUALITY

### *Towards the Harmonization of the Personal and the Social World ?*

This presentation, adopting a critical perspective, aims at:

- re-visiting gender equality, taking into consideration
  - the relationship between the personal and social world (micro – macro level)
  - the multiculturalism of the person
  - the roles we perform influenced by cultural rituals and practices
- deconstructing what is female and male “in a different voice”,
- suggesting the harmonisation of female and male qualities in an *androgynous* way through a process of *self and social awareness*,
- critically ‘remembering’ historic moments of today’s social context which is dominated by male values and principles,
- highlighting the importance of the role of leaders and educators for promoting gender equality at work and in society at large,
- suggesting different ways of Media representation of female and male ‘truths’ and ‘realities’ based on the production of alternative *rituals* and *texts*.

The presentation will be oral, using Power Point as an audio-visual stimulus. A short video is included in the Power Point presentation: the duration of the video is about one minute.

### Outline

This presentation takes into consideration:

- EU resolutions related to gender equality
- Lisbon Strategy priorities related to stability, security, mutual solidarity, investing in people and knowledge
- Basic characteristics of our *New Era* which are: rapid changes, anxiety, uncertainty and risk, especially in the context of globalization.

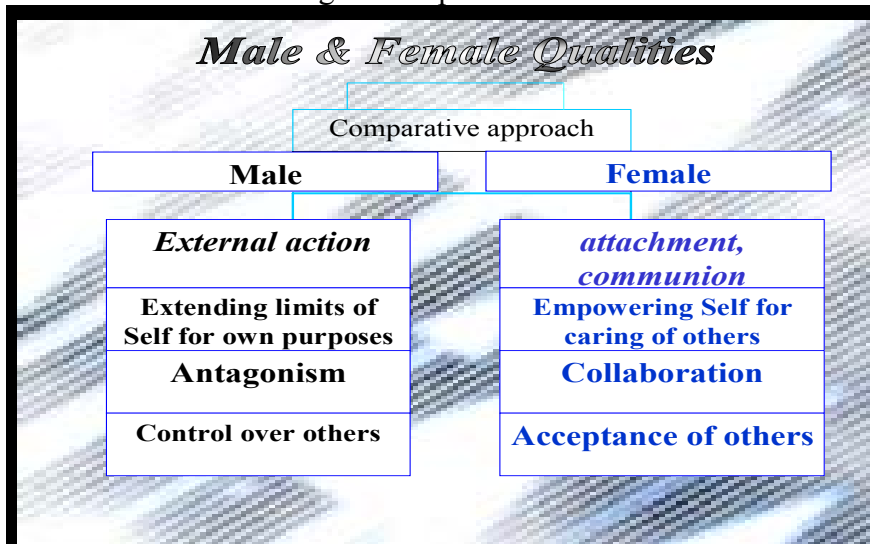
Equality is re-visited after a short analysis of the relationship between the personal and social ‘world’, or identity formation (micro-level of the person) and sociopolitical, cultural, historical, economic factors, as well as the Media and globalization (macro-level). What is suggested here is that factors working at a macro-level influence both the construction of identity as well as the structure of contexts such as the family and the world of work and the roles we perform in these contexts. According to the fields of *communication and cultural studies* performance is regarded as the most important element in communication. Performance refers to daily life *rituals and practices* used by a community in order to:

- Initiate its members into a specific cultural framework through roles they learn to play,
- Coordinate their behaviour,

- Influence the way of construing identity,
- Promote a homogeneous way of understanding the self and the world.

This implies that through living in particular communities where the patriarchal ideology is dominant, and influenced by rituals and practices, we learn to perform *multiple* roles consistent with this ideology in routine practices and events which take place at home, at work and in other contexts. Therefore, rituals need to be critically revisited and analysed because it is argued that the person may –to an extent- be *the product of communication*.

In this presentation gender identity, female and male qualities are presented “in a different voice”<sup>1</sup>, according to research data which argue that men and women face important dilemmas at developmental stages of their lives in a different way. Key female and male qualities such as the following will be presented:



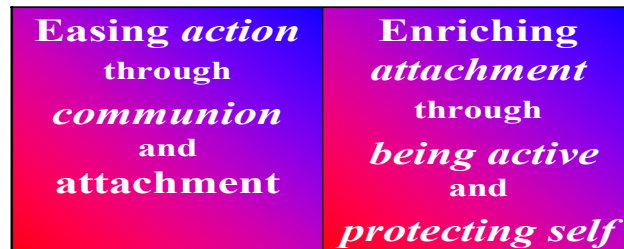
In the discussion concerning the promotion of women’s participation in decision making and power positions, it is also important to see how *power* is defined in male and female terms. It is thus supported in the literature that men view power as action, antagonism dominance over others, extending own limits and violating those of others in different social contexts such as, for example, work and policy making. On the other hand, women, traditionally feel the need to *be* powerful rather than *act* aggressively, recognizing the value of relationships, feelings, acceptance of difference, collaboration, interdependence and synergy, as well as choosing to empower themselves so that they can care for others and protect them more effectively.

From the above we can see how society and social contexts have been formulated under the influence of male qualities and/or principles: that is action, agency, antagonism, autonomy of the powerful ones, violating the ‘borders’ of the less powerful and exercising control over others and the environment.

What is suggested in this presentation is that qualities rather than seen as mutually exclusive should be approached as both necessary and complementary and the concept of the ‘androgyny’ should be promoted. For example, action and attachment could be seen as shown in the following transparency:

<sup>1</sup> According to the title of Carol Gilligan’s book (1982, Harvard University Press, Cambridge)

## **Towards a creative reconciliation?**



In such an approach it is useful to see our concept of the person and our definition of identity. The person is characterized by a multiplicity or ‘multiculturality’ of parts, roles or ‘sub-personalities’<sup>2</sup>, which, rather than being ‘at war’ between them, should be synthesized and harmonized so that each can enrich our ‘personal world’, our activities and roles.

Harmonising the self requires the promotion of: **Critical Self and Social Awareness. Gender Awareness** is a central part in a process of self awareness as well as for the reconciliation of internal parts and role performance.

What is suggested in the presentation, however, is that:

- As women, especially women in positions of power, we need to reflect on ourselves and see whether we have unconsciously internalized male values and principles.
- We also need to wonder whether working on the self, finding internal harmony, promoting personal development and synthesizing roles is an easy enterprise in our ‘brave new world’ often characterized by ‘turbulence’ of different sorts. As a reminder of what is going on at this level a short video (of less than two minutes) is played, presenting some quite historic ‘moments’ or events which reveal the dominance of traditional male qualities influencing decision making and shaping the world.

What is emphasized following the video presentation is that a person who is critically self aware needs also to be critically socially aware. Awareness and personal development, viewed from a critical perspective, does not in any way imply a narcissistic self but a person who wishes to contribute to the social becoming, to social development, through informed action, through undertaking the role of an active citizen of a community and of the world. Thus, the *personal is really political*; the promotion of self awareness has a political dimension, since after all, the person who is not isolated from the social *milieu* is a political being. This means that changing the self is related with:

- ***changing attitudes***
- ***changing institutions through active citizenship***
- ***changing the world***

With regard to attitudes, some basic attitudes which are important for the promotion of gender equality and for the creation of a better world are:

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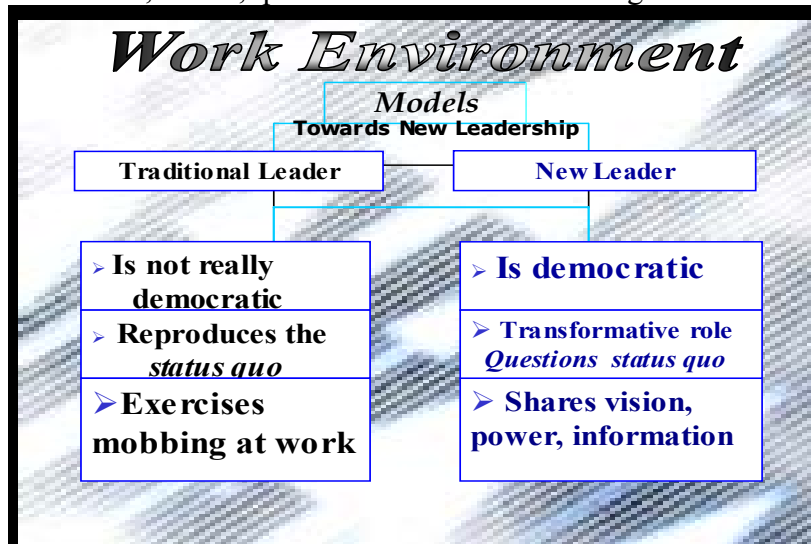
<sup>2</sup> A psychological term used in Psychosynthesis, an approach developed by Roberto Assaggioli (1965).

- **Acceptance of self & other / Other**
- **Flexibility & critical / dynamic adaptation**
- **Understanding of multiple realities and ‘truths’**
- **Reconciliation of own needs with those of others**

With regard to the issue of changing institutions, two important institutions in the context of which changes are needed are *Education and the World of Work*.

Thus reference will be made to the role of educators and the political responsibility of intellectuals.

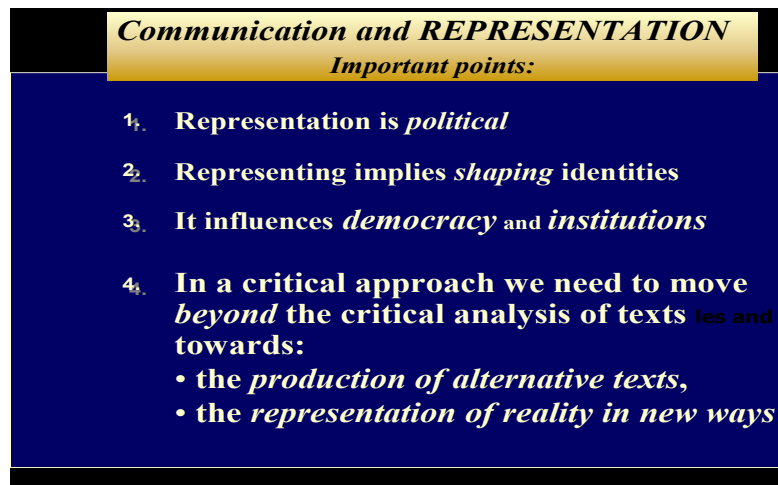
With regard to the world of work the presentation will refer to the important role of a leader today. New models for leadership emphasize the role of the leader and point to qualities leaders need to have. These are qualities which are closer to what are considered to be female, that is, qualities such as the following:



Finally, reference will be made to the role of the Media which influence identity formation and, in particular, gender identity through specific representations, mythologies and rituals they project. The media re-present men and women according to the concepts and stereotypes of the dominant, patriarchal ideology. However, by doing so, they reproduce the present reality.

Therefore, some suggestions concerning the production of alternative texts which will represent women in a more just way and promote more democratic principles and values will be made at the end. Some

The main points about representation can be seen in the transparency which follows.



**Communication and REPRESENTATION**  
*Important points:*

1. Representation is *political*
2. Representing implies *shaping* identities
3. It influences *democracy* and *institutions*
4. In a critical approach we need to move *beyond* the critical analysis of texts *les* and towards:
  - the *production of alternative texts,*
  - the *representation of reality in new ways*

Note

**It should be noted that the presentation will be based on a careful development of Power Point transparencies in order to facilitate understanding on the part of the audience. It should also be noted that the presentation will be oral avoiding academic terminology.**