



### Research Article

## Challenging Stereotypes: A Conversation Analysis Approach to Students' Narratives about Gender

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### Abstract

Creating effective prevention programs is essential for reducing gender-based violence (GBV). Research underscores the importance of addressing GBV during early schooling years (Oliver, 2014), as schools, alongside families, serve as primary socialization environments for children and young people. Building on this context, this article presents a study that used prevention-based class seminars to challenge gender stereotypes and prompt reflection on GBV, gender-based discrimination, and gender stereotyping. The study involved approximately 600 minutes of classroom video recordings from five Italian middle school classes, featuring 112 12-year-old pupils during expert-conducted seminars. Using a Conversation Analysis approach, the data analysis reveals the forms of communication and gender narratives produced by the students during the workshops. While some narratives reinforced gender stereotypes and traditional norms, most narratives promoted equal gender relationships. This study contributes to research on violence prevention in schools, demonstrating how school-based programs can significantly impact students' reflections on gender stereotypes and violence.

**Keywords:** Gender-based violence, gender stereotypes, prevention-based seminars, narratives in interaction, Conversation Analysis, Italian middle school.

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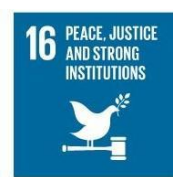
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## 1. Introduction

Gender, viewed as a product of ongoing social construct, embodies a web of differences and inequalities, particularly pronounced between men and women (Lorber, 1995; Risman, 2004; Connell, 2009). This social construct determines the creation of a gender order, a system of relations primarily defined by binary identities and hierarchical dynamics between men and women (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Article 1 of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines GBV as any act “that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (UN General Assembly, 1993). Within this framework, GBV emerges as a pressing social issue manifesting in various forms such as sexual, physical, psychological, economic, and cultural. GBV unfolds across different contexts including homes, public spaces, institutions, and even online realms.

As GBV it is deeply rooted in harmful stereotypes and prejudices (Council of Europe, 2019), a key aspect of combating GBV is prevention based on deconstructing stereotypes (Council of Europe, 2019; Oliver, 2014).

Prevention strategies are often centred on educational initiatives, especially within schools starting from early childhood. These initiatives primarily target gender stereotypes and biases, which are seen as rooted in traditional patriarchal gender orders and as potential drivers of gender-based discrimination and violence. Drawing from this background, the study presented in this article delves into prevention-based class seminars designed to challenge gender stereotypes and provoke reflection on forms of GBV, gender-based discrimination and gender stereotyping among middle school students in Italy. Drawing on the idea that gender is made relevant by participants in interactions (Goodwin, 2011), a Conversation Analysis approach was adopted to analyse classroom video-recorded interactions. Conversation analysis is an approach to the study of social interaction and talk-in-interaction with the intention of identifying stable practices and the underlying normative organisations of interaction (Sidnell, 2016). Adopting a Conversation Analysis approach to examine classroom discourse, allows to identify the communicative dynamics and gender narratives produced by students during the prevention-based class seminars. By doing so, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of research on violence prevention within schools. Prevention-based seminars are designed to reduce gender stereotyping by educating students about the harmful effects of these biases, thereby influencing attitudes and behaviours in a way that can significantly reduce the rates of GBV and gender-based discrimination within school environments.

## 2. Preventing Gender Violence in Educational Settings

The construction of gender and the process of socialising individuals into gender norms are continuous activities that occur within communications, social interactions, discourses, and narratives. According to Risman (2004), gender is conceptualised as a social structure, therefore it can be understood as a system of inequality that is constructed and ingrained at the institutional, individual, and interactional levels of societies. In addition, the research in the field of gender

studies, suggests that this gender structure intersects with other systems of inequality such as race, class, and sexuality (Carbado et al., 2013).

According to UNESCO, a significant portion of school violence and bullying in 2023 was linked to gender (UNESCO, 2023). School-related GBV impacts millions of children, families, and communities (UNESCO, 2023). This type of violence encompasses acts or threats of sexual, physical, or psychological harm that occur within and near schools, driven by gender norms and stereotypes and perpetuated by unequal power dynamics. For this reason, schools serve as optimal environments to advocate for the prevention of GBV and abuse, equipping children with the knowledge to identify and diminish risky behaviours (Stanley et al., 2015; Villardón-Gallego et al., 2023). In educational settings, prevention efforts commonly focus on educational programs mainly aimed at challenging gender stereotypes and prejudices, which are viewed as deeply embedded in traditional patriarchal gender norms and as potential catalysts for gender-based discrimination and violence.

In the Italian educational contexts, there are measures and initiatives aimed at combating GBV in schools at national level. For instance, Law No. 107/2015 (Ministry of Education, 2015): introduced the obligation to promote gender equality education, prevent GBV, and combat all forms of discrimination in schools at all levels. In addition, the Ministry of Education (2015) has issued specific guidelines to support schools in implementing educational and training programs against GBV. Nevertheless, prevention-based seminars are rarely taking place in schools.

Interventions implemented within schools have the potential to decrease gender stereotyping (Pfeifer et al., 2007). As suggested by research, children's preferences for toys, styles of play, academic interests, self-esteem, and belief in their abilities are all influenced by gender stereotypes, as they internalize societal expectations of their respective genders early on (Blakemore & Centers, 2005; Leaper, 2015). These stereotypes also manifest in children's choices for future careers (Woods & Hampson, 2010), potentially limiting their interest in professions that diverge from traditional gender norms. In relation to this, studies have indicated some beneficial outcomes from interventions aimed at mitigating gender stereotypes (Pahlke et al., 2014).

### **3. Narratives in interaction**

An approach using narratives can be beneficial for examining how speakers utilise culturally accessible ideas of gender, they reproduce stereotypes and shape gender narratives and identities during interactions. Narrating, as described by Bamberg (2006), is an activity and form of performance that unfolds among individuals during their everyday social interactions and conversations, influenced by specific situational and contextual factors. Somers (1994) suggests that individuals shape their social identities through narratives and narrativity. These narrative identities are unique, adaptable, and contingent, arising from social relations. Through storytelling and narrative, individuals situate themselves and construct a 'sense of self', an understanding of 'who they are', in a reflective manner. The construction of selves and identities occurs through interaction, where individuals can either align with or challenge traditional and prevailing narratives and discourses (Bamberg, 2011). Through narratives, speakers can reproduce the existing power structures (Rossi, 2019) or, on the contrary, they might challenge those structures

and produce innovative narratives in interaction. While producing narratives related to gender, speakers in interactions tend to perpetuate patriarchal gender narratives and prevailing discourses. Yet, speakers can also resist traditional gender narratives and provide new and more egalitarian discourses.

### **3.1. Gender Narratives in Interaction - a Conversational Analysis Approach**

Conversation Analysis, a methodological approach utilized for empirical observation (often through recording) and description (Liddicoat, 2007), is a valuable tool for investigating how speakers construct gender narratives in interactions. Conversation Analysis allows for the exploration of talk in interaction. Specifically, a Conversation Analysis allows to examine (1) the underlying organizational rules governing everyday interactions (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1999) as well as (2) the diverse resources participants employ to communicate (Mondada, 2014).

Within the domain of gender studies, research suggests that the Conversation Analysis approach allows to examine the emergence and the relevance of gender within interactions (Goodwin, 2011; Weatherall, 2002). This is done by exploring the different aspects that are constructed within the interaction such as (1) participants' orientation to gender (meanings, expectations, etc.), (2) the accomplishment of stereotyped and normative representations about gender through conversational structures (turn-taking, repairs, etc.), (3) challenges and refusals to gender stereotypes, (4) the production of gender-neutral or gender-equalitarian accounts (Stokoe & Smithson, 2001). In addition, this approach draws on the consideration of viewing every speaker, therefore including children as active participants in social interactions and gender socialisation as a process of negotiation and interpretive reproduction (James, 2009).

## **4. Data Collection and Methodology**

The data collected for this study consists of approximately 600 minutes of classroom video recordings from five Italian middle school classes. These recordings were gathered during expert-conducted seminars, which involved a total of 112 middle-school-aged pupils (with a mean age of 12 years old) and maintained an equally distributed sex ratio. All participants were residents of the Emilia-Romagna region, situated in northern Italy. Each class, comprising amongst 20 to 25 students, participated in 4 hours of expert-conducted seminars (divided into two two-hours long seminars). The seminars were led by two experts, one male and one female. However, in the excerpts presented in this paper, only the interactions involving the male expert are showcased. This selection is solely based on the representativeness of the content emerging in the excerpts. It should be noted that both experts were specifically trained to conduct the seminars. Drawing on the idea that GBV is rooted in stereotypes (Council of Europe, 2019), the intention of the seminars was to create a space for dialogue and discussion, therefore influencing students' present and future behaviours within the bigger scope of preventing and reducing GBV and gender-based discrimination and stereotyping within school environments. Moreover, the aim of the seminars was to create an inclusive atmosphere where students felt encouraged to intervene without fear of judgment, and the topics discussed were not taught in a traditional sense but rather explored collaboratively. To achieve this, the experts followed a dialogic facilitation

approach (Baraldi, 2019; James, 2009). Dialogic facilitation entails ongoing conversation between teachers and students, rather than one-way presentations by the teacher. Through dialogue, teachers can leverage students' everyday perspectives, engage with their evolving ideas, and promote children's agency. Due to this approach, as will be evident in the excerpts in section 5, the experts may appear less active in the interaction, leaving more space for students' turns. However, their role is crucial in guiding students' dialogue by managing turn-taking, posing questions to support students' reasoning, and fostering critical thinking. In this sense, the seminars should be understood as space for discussion and dialogue, where everyone can bring in their unique experiences and identities. They serve as platforms for collaborative exploration rather than traditional teaching sessions, fostering an environment where students feel empowered to contribute and engage actively.

As the seminars intended to raise awareness and foster dialogue on gender stereotypes and discrimination with the intention of preventing attitudes and behaviours that lead to GBV, different kind of inputs such as advertisements, images, and statements were selected by the experts and adopted in the seminars. All the inputs aimed at fostering a reflection on gender stereotypes and discrimination. For example, two advertisements were presented. One depicted a stereotyped assignment of family roles where the mother was responsible for all household tasks, such as cleaning and preparing food. In contrast, the other advertisement portrayed a family where the father starts the day by taking care of all the housework, including waking up the children and preparing breakfast, while the mother enjoys breakfast and reads the newspaper. Additionally, statements were presented containing stereotyped sentences about gender, such as "boys cannot like ballet" or "girls cannot play football". These inputs were designed to challenge and prompt discussion about these common stereotypes. One further input adopted were human silhouettes reproducing various actions (e.g., cooking, carrying dishes, carrying a soccer ball, building a wall, etc.) and wearing specific clothes (e.g., an apron, a carpenter hat, etc.). The silhouettes were coloured in light blue and intentionally neutral, avoiding any detail that could be linked with a specific gender. However, they were chosen because they represented actions and clothes that are usually gender stereotyped. For instance, the silhouette of a person wearing an apron and bringing dishes could be understood as the stereotype of a mother, the silhouette of a person holding a soccer ball could be perceived as the stereotype of a male football player, and so on. The data presented and analysed in this paper is solely referred to the moments of interaction that took place after presenting the human silhouettes inputs.

Considering that video recording is a productive research technique for undertaking qualitative analysis of communicative processes in verbal and non-verbal aspects within educational settings (Rossi, 2019; Mondada, 2014) the class seminars were all video recorded with the children's consent and the one of their parents.

The recordings were then transcribed following CA transcription conventions (Jefferson, 1996; O'Connell & Kowal, 1994). A simplified version of Jefferson's conventions (Jefferson, 1996; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1999) was utilised to transcribe the recorded material, resulting in granular transcriptions with detailed representations of both verbal and non-verbal elements of communication.

The symbols used for data transcription are presented below:

- (.) Micro pause
- (7) A timed pause
- [ ] Speech overlaps
- A cut-off
- :: A stretched sound
- (?) Unclear section
- (text) Hypothesis of an unclear section
- (( )) Comments and observations of the transcriber
- TEXT High tone of voice

In addition, in the transcription phase, each participant was assigned a pseudonym.

In the following section and based on the theoretical background outlined above, an analysis will be conducted on transcriptions extracted from expert-conducted class seminars. To fulfil the requirements of Conversation Analysis, the analysis followed a bottom-up approach, allowing researchers to meticulously examine the interactions and dialogues as they naturally unfolded. The chosen extracts, translated from Italian into English and commented upon, are not indicative of the complete set of interactions recorded. Rather, they represent instances where gender narratives emerged in the interaction as a consequence of the input provided to the students by the conductors of the class seminars.

## 5. Exploring Gender Order in Interaction: Equal and Fluid Narratives

The transcription and analysis of interactions that unfolded during the expert-lead class seminars have provided insight into two distinct narrative types. From one side, narratives that perpetuate traditional and dominant gender norms are recurrent. These narratives often reflect established societal expectations and stereotypes related to gender. However, alongside these traditional narratives, the data also comprises alternative gender narratives or counter-narratives. These alternative narratives challenge the traditional and patriarchal gender order, offering different perspectives on gender roles and identities. The juxtaposition of these opposing narratives within the data highlights the complex interplay between entrenched gender norms and the potential for change and diversification in societal perceptions of gender. The following four excerpts are examples from the corpus of recordings where gender narratives emerged in the interaction.

Excerpt 1 displays, on one hand, the reproduction of the traditional gender stereotype of a mother serving food to the family. On the other hand, the same interaction proposes an alternative and equal gender narrative. The excerpt was recorded after presenting to the students the silhouette of a person bringing dishes and wearing an apron.

*Excerpt 1 – class 1*

- 45 Alessandro He's a waiter (.) with (.) what is he carrying there?
- 46 Op2 A waiter (.) serving?
- 47 Alessandro A woman (.) who is carrying some dishes
- 48 Op2 So if she's a female waiter, what do you say?
- 49 Alessandro A waitress
- 50 Natalia A waitress
- 51 Op2 A waitress
- 52 Roberto ( ) ((To Natalia))
- 53 Natalia Come on
- 54 ? ( )
- 55 ? ( )
- 56 Op2 A waitress (.) I didn't add because usually what do waiters do?
- 57 ? They bring dinner
- 58 Op2 Exactly
- 59 Letizia To me though it seems more like: a mum bringing the food
- 60 Op2 A?
- 61 Letizia A mum
- 62 Op2 A mum bringing the food (.) a mum?
- 63 Letizia Yes
- 64 Roberto Or a dad could be
- 65 ? ( )

66	Op2	Let's take another one (.) one who hasn't spoken
67	Sonia	To me, more than a woman, it seems like a man
68	Op2	Huh?
69	Sonia	To me, more than a woman, it seems like a man
70	Op2	A man (.) a man (.) so you end up with it being a man?
71	Valentina	A dad
72	Op2	A dad? A man? (.) Dad (.) what does he do? What does he bring? (writing on the board))
73	Alessio	The food
74	?	The food
75	Op2	Bringing dishes

This excerpt illustrates two emerging and opposite narratives in the interaction. Initially, guided by the expert conducting the class seminar (Op2), Alessandro presents his narrative by stating that he recognises in the silhouette a waiter (turn 45). When questioned by Op2 about whether he sees a waiter serving (turn 46), Alessandro makes gender relevant in his narrative by specifying that he sees a woman carrying dishes (turn 47). In the subsequent turn (48), Op2 revisits Alessandro's initial narrative and asks which word to use if he sees a female waiter in the image. Since the interaction is in Italian, Op2 points out how gender is embedded in the Italian language, therefore *cameriere* (waiter) and *cameriera* (waitress) can be used. In turn 49, Alessandro provides the word "waitress". The same response is also echoed by Natalia (turn 50). After a few inaudible turns, Letizia in turn 59 presents a normative gender narrative by stating that, in her opinion, the silhouette is a mum bringing the food. Following a request for repetition (turn 60) and the repetition itself (turn 61), Op2 in turn 62 reiterates Letizia's statement, thereby revoicing the student's narrative and emphasising its significance. Turn 64 marks a turning point in the interaction as Roberto intervenes and suggests that the silhouette could also represent a dad. Roberto's turn presents an opposing narrative to the one proposed by Letizia. In fact, while Letizia's narrative follows a traditional gender order, Roberto's perspective offers an alternative and more equal view, the one of a dad serving the food. However, Op2 does not hear Roberto's turn and instead asks if someone else would like to contribute (turn 66). The subsequent turn (67) is then taken by Sonia, who also explains that she sees a man. Interestingly, Valentina echoes Roberto's narrative in turn 71, suggesting that the silhouette could represent a dad. This brief excerpt highlights how, despite some students aligning with a traditional gender narrative by reinforcing the stereotype of a mum wearing an apron and serving food, others propose an



alternative narrative that challenges the traditional gender order and the stereotype of the mother as the primary person responsible for serving food at home. Instead, they suggest that it could also be a dad, thereby proposing an equal distribution of household duties.

Same as for Excerpt 1, Excerpt 2 was recorded after presenting to the students the silhouette of a person bringing dishes and wearing an apron. This time the recording, that took place in class 2, comprises a student's explicit reflection on gender stereotypes.

*Excerpt 2 – class 2*

- |   |          |   |
|---|----------|---|
| 1 | Op2      | He made an observation that (.) whether it's a man or a woman who's finished and now serves ((points to Leonardo))  |
| 2 | Leonardo | E:hm (.) I was saying   |
| 3 | Op2      | Yes?  |
| 4 | Leonardo | That at the beginning our brain tells us (.) immediately makes us think it's a woman because maybe she has that apron (.) maybe with the polka dots those things there (.) that one immediately thinks oh it's a woman (.) our brain ((touches the forehead with both hands)) |
| 5 | Op2      | So:   |
| 6 | Leonardo | However, it could simply be also a man  |
| 7 | Op2      | Yes it could be   |
| 8 | Leonardo | Yes   |

In this instance, the development of an alternative gender narrative is achieved through a student's explicit reflection on our tendency to perpetuate gender stereotypes. In the excerpt, Op2 (turn 1) revisits a previous remark made by one of the students and suggests the idea that the silhouette could represent both a man and a woman. In turn 2, Leonardo takes a turn to continue his earlier point. This is indicated by the words "E:hm (.) I was saying". In turn 3, by indicating agreement, Op2 signals for Leonardo to continue his turn. Leonardo's words in turn 4 elaborate on what, in his view, occurs when we see the silhouette. Notably, he attempts to describe the process of perpetuating a stereotype. Leonardo explains that initially, our brain, upon seeing a person wearing a dotted apron, automatically assumes it is a woman. In his turn, Leonardo uses the phrase "those things" to refer to specific clothing and accessories associated with gender (e.g., a polka-dotted apron as a stereotyped accessory for a woman). He then concludes his statement in turn 6 by stating that, despite our initial assumptions, the person depicted in the image "could simply be a man as well", therefore proposing an alternative to the normative narrative. Beyond presenting an innovative narrative, Leonardo's turn demonstrates his awareness of the presence

of stereotypes and an understanding that we are deeply influenced by them and our tendency to reproduce them.

The following sequence exemplifies both a hybrid narrative and an alternative one. This excerpt was recorded after providing the students with another input. This time the silhouette shown to the students is the one of a person holding a soccer ball.

*Excerpt 3 – class 4*

- |     |         |  |
|-----|---------|--|
| 103 | Anna    | Even in the previous one (.) there aren't enough elements that say it's a male                                     |
| 104 | Op2     | It's hard to understand (.) you know it's these damn masks (.) you say there aren't                                |
| 105 | Anna    | There are no precise data that con- that confirm it's a male   |
| 106 | Op2     | There aren't therefore (.) from the outlines it's not clear (.) there are no precise data that confirm it's a male |
| 107 | Claudio | Young boy slash (.) young girl slash (.) athletic person   |
| 108 | Op2     | Nice one (.) this one? (.) What do you see?  |

The excerpt showcases two students' narratives. The first one to emerge is the one proposed by Anna, who, after being exposed to the input, suggests that the silhouette does not include enough elements to determine if it represents a male. Anna's narrative stands out because, on one hand, it explains the student's reasoning and intention of looking at the image with a neutral perspective. With her turn, she makes it explicit that she carefully examined the image's details. Yet, at the same time, by saying "there aren't enough elements that say it's a male" (turn 103), it is understood that the initial assumption, upon seeing someone with a soccer ball, is to think it is male. In turn 104, Op2 asks Anna to repeat because, at the time of the recording, students were still wearing masks due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In turn 105 Anna conveys the same message she illustrated before, which is that from the image's details we cannot confirm it is a male. The following turn is produced by Op2 who revoices Anna's turn to emphasise it. Claudio takes the turn (107) to convey his own equal narrative. While keeping a focus on the language, Claudio proposes an inclusive description of the image by saying "young boy slash (.) young girl slash (.)" and finally concluding the turn with a broader and more generic "athletic person". Similarly to the previous examples, the excerpt has shown two dynamics. On one side, there is a student (Anna) perpetuating the normative gender stereotype of a football player having to be a man, yet she does it more covertly since she also tried to be objective and carefully look at the details by suggesting that we cannot definitively say the image represents a man. Taking from Anna's turn that highlighted the image's ambiguity, Claudio proposes an equal perspective on the image. The

excerpt could be understood as an example of a co-narrative, since the students' turns are co-constructed throughout the interaction (Norrick, 2007).

The last excerpt (Excerpt 4), recorded in class 2, presents the interaction after all the silhouettes were presented to the students. At this moment, Op2 creates a final moment of reflection to further discuss gender stereotypes. Op2 prompts a reflection on colours and their association with gender, i.e., blue for male and pink for female. To do this, she uses the same silhouette to mention the colour blue, as they are coloured in light blue.

*Excerpt 4 – class 2*

- 30 Op2 Who knows? (.) Others? (.) How are the (.) men and women that you have seen here are depicted? (.) How do you see them?
- 31 Leonardo Ah same (.) they all have no eyes ((pointing to the left with his left hand))
- 32 Jaime Flat (.) or very short
- 33 Op2 Wait one at a time (.) we said (.) then
- 34 Filippo Without hair
- 35 Op2 Without hair
- 36 Leonardo They don't have any signs that tell you if they're male or female ((moving his left hand))
- 37 Balmir They are silhouettes
- 38 Jaime There's no difference
- 39 Op2 There are no differences (.) and did you notice how they were coloured [these]
- 40 Leonardo [Blue]
- 41 Op2 In blue
- 42 Mihail Blue
- 43 Op2 In blue (.) and why do you think that is? (.) Is there a reason?
- 44 Loris Usually blue is the colour for males
- 45 Abebe [Yes, but it can also be ( )]

- 
- 46 Op2 [Usually blue is the colour for males] (.) when is blue used? (.) Which is a symbol (.) a convention
- 47 Roberto It's the colour of the sky
- 48 Op2 Huh?
- 49 Roberto It's the colour of the sky
- 50 Op2 It's the colour of the sky (.) [how]
- 51 Filippo [At birth]
- 52 Op2 If you go around and see something blue (.) what could you see? Besides the sky
- 53 Lorenzo A shirt
- 54 Op2 No (.) when you go: (.) on the door
- 55 Viktor In the bathrooms (.) for example no? (.) If you go to a public restroom there's a sign (.) for example the male silhouette is blue instead of the female or it's pink
- 56 Filippo It's pink
- 57 Op2 Or? (.) Another way?
- 58 Jaime Honestly, it doesn't make much sense
- 59 Op2 Wait, wait, him (.) don't intervene (.) what did we say? We (.) listen We're listening ((points to Arta))
- 60 Arta When a baby is born, sometimes a blue ribbon is put on the door
- 61 Op2 The blue ribbon on the door so it's a?
- 62 Arta It's a boy (.) it indicates that it's a
- 63 Op2 And what's this? Saying that there's a blue ribbon or a pink ribbon
- 64 Arta It's like indicating the gender without them saying it

- 65 Op2 Exactly (.) so? Can we use another word?
- 66 Jaime In my opinion
- 67 Op2 Yes?
- 68 Jaime In my opinion, it doesn't make much sense (.) it's the same colour so How does it matter? (.) Just the silhouette
- 69 Op2 Is it a silhouette?
- 70 Jaime [There is:]
- 71 Op2 [Do you agree] that it doesn't have much value? (.) ( ) he said (.) it doesn't have (.) it doesn't have much importance because they're a silhouette whether it's blue or not doesn't matter ((repeatedly moving both hands at chest level))
- 72 Jaime In the sense it can also be grey
- 73 Op2 Of course it can also be green
- 74 Jaime The only difference is the silhouette

In order to create a moment of final reflection on the activity, Op2 asks the students what all the silhouettes have in common (turn 30). After collecting all the responses from the students (turns 31-38), Op2 directly asks if they noticed the colours of the silhouettes. Leonardo, in turn 40, is the first to say 'blue.' In turn 43, Op2 questions the students to inquire whether they have any idea why the silhouettes are coloured in blue. In turn 44, Loris makes the gender relevance by suggesting that usually blue is the colour for males. His turn is followed by Abebe's attempt to respond to Loris with an opposing opinion. However, the end of her turn is not completely audible, and it seems Op2 also does not hear it, as she only revoices Loris's turn. In the same turn (46), Op2 also tries to give the students another element to bring them closer to the reflection she likely intends to make by saying "Which is a symbol (.) a convention". Yet none of them seem to follow her input, and the interaction starts taking another path by mentioning things coloured in blue (turns 47-54). Only Viktor, in turn, 55, makes gender relevant and proposes the conventional association of the pink colour for women and blue for men by referring to public restroom signs. Viktor's narrative is then picked up by Jaime, who, in turn, 58, reflects on the fact that this convention "doesn't make any sense". Moreover, Arta in turn 60 is the first one who seems to have understood Op2's mention of colour conventions. In fact, she mentions the tradition of hanging a blue ribbon on the house door when a baby boy is born and a pink ribbon when a baby girl is born. After further questioning by Op2, Arta concludes her reasoning in turn 64 by saying that the tradition of hanging the ribbons of different colours indicates the baby's gender without directly

stating it. Despite Op2's attempts to further question how to define the act of hanging the ribbons, Jaime (turn 68) continues the reflection he started in turn 58 by emphasizing that colours do not matter since they are just conventions.

## **5. Deconstructing gender stereotypes through classroom discussion**

Past studies underscored the critical role of effective prevention programs in reducing GBV, especially during the formative years of schooling. As highlighted by Oliver (2014), schools are pivotal environments for socialization, making them ideal settings for interventions aimed at preventing gender violence. In particular, when working with young students, prevention actions are ideal moments to challenge gender stereotypes.

Drawing from a conceptualisation of gender as a social construct and utilising a Conversation Analysis approach to examine how gender narratives emerge in talk in interaction, the study aimed to reflect on the diverse narratives students produced when stimulated. By looking at varied forms of communication that emerged during the class seminars (e.g., reactions to stimuli, turn-taking, repairs, and narratives constructions), the previous section offered an overview of narratives that emerged in the corpus of recording collected. As mentioned earlier, the four excerpts presented in this paper represent only a small part of the complete set of interactions recorded. Nevertheless, they are indicative of the kind of narratives that emerged throughout the entire corpus. The analysis presented in Section 4, allows to examine two opposite narrative dynamics. From one side, students produced narratives that followed a traditional and normative gender order based on a binary division of the roles assigned to men and women in relation to the inputs proposed. For instance, following a traditional narrative, some students associated the image of a person wearing an apron and serving food as a mother (Excerpt 1). On the other hand, more often, a tendency emerged in the corpus which was the creation of counter-narratives or equal narratives that challenge the traditional gender order. For instance, some students suggested that the person with the apron could also be a dad serving the food (Excerpt 1 and 2), therefore challenging the assumption of the apron-wearer and food server being exclusively a mother. Similarly, they suggested that the person with the soccer ball could be a boy or a girl (Excerpt 4), again resisting gender stereotypes by proposing a new narrative.

If given the chance, students tend to use the space for dialogue and reflection offered by the prevention of gender violence activity as a space to discuss and rethink gender stereotypes. Often this was done in a collective way, with students taking up from their classmates' suggestions and themselves proposing relevant reflections, creating what Norrick (2007) defined as a 'polyphonic', or many-voiced narration, or co-narration with multiple active co-tellers. In this sense, the classroom environment became a forum for exploration and questioning of societal norms regarding gender roles and by engaging in discussions and activities that prompt reflection on gender stereotypes and violence, and where the students were able to articulate more egalitarian views.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of research advocating for violence prevention programs within schools. By focusing on prevention-based class seminars, the research demonstrates the potential of these interventions to challenge asymmetric gender norms and

promote more equal relationships between genders. Through the lens of gender as a social construct and utilizing Conversation Analysis, this study sheds light on how gender narratives emerge in talk during interaction. The diverse range of narratives produced by students highlights the complexity of these issues and underscores the importance of early intervention and education in combating GBV.

## 6. Recommendations

Moments dedicated to dialogue and discussion, particularly informal interactions with experts different from the regular classroom teachers, can create significant opportunities for students to critically reflect on gender stereotypes and discrimination, therefore leading to a GBV prevention. These sessions can be crucial for engaging students more openly and thoughtfully. Informal discussions led by external experts provide a unique platform for addressing sensitive topics in a non-threatening and supportive setting as, unlike the traditional teacher-student dynamic, the presence of an expert can foster a sense of novelty, encouraging students to participate more actively and candidly in the conversation. This openness is essential for deconstructing deeply ingrained gender stereotypes and for allowing students to voice their thoughts and experiences without fear of judgment. Moreover, these dialogues can influence students' behaviors and attitudes towards GBV by promoting critical thinking and self-reflection. When students are exposed to diverse viewpoints and are encouraged to discuss and challenge societal norms, they become more aware of the implications of their beliefs and actions. This awareness is a crucial step in fostering a more inclusive and equitable mindset, which can lead to more respectful and non-violent interactions among peers. In summary, school should integrate such experts-conducted interventions in the educational curriculum as they can significantly enhance students' understanding of gender stereotypes and discrimination. By providing a space for critical reflection and open conversation, these moments contribute to shaping students' behaviors and attitudes towards GBV, ultimately supporting the broader goal of violence prevention and promoting gender equality in schools.

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