

Gender – biology or sociology

Summary

Gender is a multidimensional concept. Politically it is important to understand and recognise gender stereotypes. In biology it is a part of the male or female identity and is not the sole element that determines female or male identity. There are other factors like social class, ethnic background, age etc. In addition, what we learn about being a woman or man is determined through power relations that only allow us to act in a pre-determined way.

Module	Group size	Group age	Duration
• Prevention	• small	• 12 - 15 • 16 - 19	• 15 min • 30 min

Purpose

- To be able to define the term
- Understand political, cultural, social dimension of the term
- To become aware about cultural differences by defining the gender
- To recognize how the social role of the specific gender has the impact to the political and societal dimensions

Description

1. Participants go into pairs and identify the personal characteristics, capacities, social roles and categories (attributes) with which they are identified. They can use adjectives (like "I am responsible, I am chaotic, I am dominant, I am emotional etc.) or attitudes (like "to let oneself go", "to care for the others and less for myself", "to not be able to live alone", "to talk in a loud voice", "to dominate a conversation", etc.) and social categories (like physical appearance, social class, age, ethnic background, sexual orientation, race, disabilities, religion).

2. The facilitator makes three columns on a large sheet of paper. Label the first column "Female" and the third one "Male" and leave the one in the middle blank. After 10 minutes each pair has to present each other with the characteristics that they have just identified. The group has to decide if the characteristics are male or female or both. Once a list with male and female characteristics is finished, fill in more male or female characteristics that are missing.

3. Now reverse the headings of the first and third columns by writing male above the first column and female above the third column. Working down the list, discuss whether women can exhibit the characteristics and behaviours attributed to males and vice versa. Those attributes, which are unchangeable and usually not considered, should be in the middle column. Generally, in the non-changeable list you will find "sex" or to be a "woman" or "man".

4. Mark the characteristics of social categories like ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, social class, age etc. and discuss the way in which these categories could be changed. It is very important to emphasise that biological sex is not the only "unchangeable" category. For example, for young women, discussion of the category "age" is very interesting, because although age changes, it is also

fixed in determined moments. What does it mean to be a “young woman”?

Male (Female)	Not changeable	Female (Male)
Dominate others Exercise power Educated Responsible Violent	Sex	Caregiver To let oneself go Educated Responsible Solidarity
Middle class Age Religion Origin	Middle class Age Religion Origin	Middle class Age Religion Origin

Make sure that all words that belong to the middle column are discussed as openly as possible, especially the category “sex”.

5. Discuss whether you really exchange what was categorized as exchangeable.

Feedback

Explain that sex is a genetic and biological category while gender refers to social/cultural ideas and expected roles for women and men in society. Because of this, the content of gender can vary across cultures and societies. Point out that even though the social roles of women and men vary from culture to culture, we can see that women are always subordinates to men. Explain that because of this, “gender” refers to the gendered POWER RELATIONS that result due to the difference in gender.

Point out that people often associate sex with gender or vice-versa so that they list the same words under sex and gender; the word ‘gender’ is also often used in the wrong context instead of ‘sex’ (for example, when people are asked to write their gender instead of their sex on forms).

Materials needed

Pencils/ pens, flipchart.

Methodology

Discussion board, group dynamic exercises.

Advice for Trainer

It is very important to learn that these behaviours can be changed in theory. It is important to make them keep this in mind to enable them to work towards change, but that they should realise that although it works in theory, power relations often don’t allow this. We have to learn that our identity is related to pre determined behaviour patterns and that these patterns emerge because we biologically are a woman or a man! These are the power relations!

Trainer should pre-process the exercise before; it must have already experience in group dynamics work, so he can be legitimate and professional. Exercise raises important questions in particular in intercultural and religious diverse environment.

Source / Literature

Women without borders. (2006). Young Women Fit for Politics. Retrieved from www.women.without.borders.org



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