

1. Title: Gender not Sex

Short Description/Overview:

Gender refers to socially constructed difference between women and men. Therefore, gender inequalities are deeply rooted in society and culture. Categories such as "man" and "woman" are products of a specific historic period and social context and as such are subjected to transformations and change.

This activity is a part of the skills-building resource pack on gender and reproductive health for adolescents and youth workers developed: de Bruyn, M. & France, N. (2001). Gender or sex: who cares?. Chapel Hill: Ipas

Themes: sex, gender, gender stereotypes

Time: 30 minutes

Group size: 8 – 25 participants

Objectives

Understand the difference between 'sex' and 'gender' and learn to recognize gender stereotypes.

Materials Needed:

- Flipchart papers
- Markers
- Scotch tape

Step-by-step

1. Make three columns on flipchart paper. Label the first column "Woman" and leave the other two blank. Ask participants to identify personality traits, abilities and roles (attributes) that are often associated with women; these may include stereotypes prevalent in their communities.
2. Next label the third column "Man" and ask participants to again make a list of personality traits, abilities and roles that are often associated with men.
3. If participants do not give any negative or positive traits, abilities or roles for either sex, add some to ensure that both columns include positive and negative words.
4. If the participants do not mention any biological characteristics (such as breasts, beard, penis, vagina), add some to the two columns.
5. Now reverse the headings of the first and the third columns by writing Man above the first column and Woman above the third column. Working down the list, ask the participants whether men can exhibit the characteristics and behaviours attributed to women and

weather women can exhibit those attributed to men. Those attributes usually not considered interchangeable are placed into the middle column that is then labeled "Sex".

6. To save time, it is not necessary to discuss each term separately; participants can also simply be asked whether there are any terms in the lists which cannot be reversed.

However, make sure that all the words that belong in the 'Sex' column are discussed.

7. Expect participants to debate the meanings of some words – one of the goals of this exercise is to demonstrate that people assign different meanings to most characteristics that are gender-based. So don't feel surprised or frustrated by the debates that occur!

Debriefing and evaluation

Explain that all the words in the 'Man' and 'Woman' columns refer to gender.

- Explain that sex has to do with biological and genetic matters 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 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 inappropriately instead of 'sex' (for example, when people are asked their gender instead of their sex on forms).
- Stress that stereotyped ideas about female and male qualities can be damaging because they limit our potential to develop the full range of possible human capacities. If we agree to accept stereotypes as guides for our own behaviour, it prevents us from determining our own interests and skills, discourages men from participating in 'women's work' (such as childcare) and restricts women from choosing roles that are traditionally 'male' (such as engineering and sports).
- Emphasize that this does not mean that we cannot enjoy displaying qualities that are usually associated with our own sex only that is important for all of us to make our own decisions about what we do.

Tips for facilitators

Be prepared to handle discussions on different types of sexuality. It can be useful to distinguish 'sexual orientation' from gender. If necessary, provide simple definitions related to sexual orientation, using a large sheet of paper or the overhead transparency. Point out that no matter what a person's sexual orientation is, s/he is influenced by social expectations regarding his/her behaviours and roles according to his/her biological sex.