

Gender Confusion

“Gender is not only male, female, man or woman. It is something much, much bigger. Gender is something that you define if you want to, not something that is to be forced upon you.”

- Complexity** Level 3
- Group size** 10 to 30
- Time** 120 minutes
- Overview** This exercise is a combination of an analytical exploration of concepts used in the ‘gender debate’ and a critical and personal reflection on one’s own gender. It also addresses sexuality and sexual orientation.
- Objectives**
- To make participants reflect upon their approach to gender as such and their own gender in particular
 - To demonstrate that gender is not only about women’s issues and that it is not a static issue to be discussed along the dichotomy male-female or man-woman
 - To link issues of ‘sexual orientation’ with ‘gender’.
- Materials**
- Pens and paper
 - Copies of your input for yourself and participants
 - Relevant visual aids or presentation equipment for the input
- Preparation** Short input / presentation on terminology used in the gender debate covering terms such as sex, gender, man, male, woman, female, transgender, inter-gender. Definitions and explanations of these terms can be found in Chapter 1 of this manual.

Instructions

- Ask the participants to write down, individually, the first thing that comes into their minds when seeing the word ‘gender’. Tell them to keep this piece of paper for themselves for a later stage in the activity.
- Introduce a brief presentation of the terminology commonly used in the gender debate covering terms such as sex, gender, man, male, woman, female, transgender, inter-gender. It is very important that you, as the facilitator, present a variety of definitions for each term to demonstrate that ‘solid’ and final definitions of these terms ‘do not exist’. Rather, the definitions you present should be explained as ‘possible definitions’. During the presentation and as each new term is introduced, encourage participants to engage in challenging and debating the definitions presented. If participants are not forthcoming by themselves, ask questions and invite them to express their opinion on what they have heard.
- Break the group up into smaller groups of maximum five people per group. Ask each group to spend a total of 20 minutes reflecting on what each of the con-

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cepts presented means for the individual members of the group. The groups can be asked to discuss these on the basis of the following guiding questions:

- What feelings do I have when I encounter those terms?
- How do I see myself in relation to those concepts and the definitions presented for them?
- Do I agree with the definitions presented? Why / Why not?
- Can I identify with any of the definitions for the terms presented? How / Why not?

The groups should prepare a short oral report that summarises the results of their discussion to be presented to the whole group in plenary.

- Bring the groups back into plenary and listen to the oral reports. Be sure to allow each group an equal amount of time and to ask if there are any questions of clarification needed after each of the reports. At this point issues that arise as a result of linguistic differences can also be addressed.
- Ask participants to write down, again, the first thing that comes into their head when seeing the word 'gender'. Ask them to look at the result of what they wrote the first time and to compare it to the new result.
- Initiate a debriefing discussion focusing on participants' reactions to any difference there may have been between what they wrote the first time and the second time in response to being asked to write down the first thing that comes to mind when seeing the word 'gender'.

Debriefing and evaluation

Ask participants to sit in a circle on the floor or on chairs. The following could be guiding questions for a debriefing discussion:

- Please share with the rest of the group what you wrote the first and second time you were asked to write down the first thing that comes to your mind when seeing the word 'gender'.
- Why do you think a difference emerged between the first and second response?
- Are you surprised by the difference if there was one? Why?
- Why do you think people have such different understandings of the terms relating to gender?
- How are those terms presented in the public sphere?
- How can language contribute to gender-based violence?
- Does gender related language and the way in which it is used contribute to discrimination?
- To what extent is there space for debating the definition of terms relating to gender where you live?
- To what extent do you think young people are involved in those debates?
- How can young people get involved in those debates?

Invite them to respond to the following process related questions:

- What did you learn during this activity?
- How did you feel during the activity?
- How do you feel now at the end of the activity?
- What have you gained from your participation in this activity?

Tips for facilitators

Be aware that the participants will have different approaches to and knowledge of the topic. Take into account that there may be confusion about the different terminology and linguistic differences, especially with regards to transgender issues. Try to explain and clarify without giving the impression that what you are telling the participants is ‘the truth’.

Suggestions for follow-up

Think about inviting a guest speaker from a local LGBT or gender organisation to come and talk to the group further on gender and gender definitions. Participants can prepare questions before they come and the invited speaker can talk about what role gender definitions and common understandings of terms have within their organisation and the work that they do.

Ideas for action

If there are participants who demonstrate an interest in the more conceptual basis of issues relating to gender, you may suggest that they consider reading Chapter 1 of this manual.

HANDOUT

You may consider distributing copies of your brief input on the terminology and concepts related to the gender debate to participants after the input.