



Gender Awareness: An Introductory Workshop

Overview:

In our society today, communities are made up of people with a wide range of ideas and orientations, even about issues as fundamental as gender. Anyone engaging in his/her community may be challenged by ideas and orientations that they have not considered. Among these ideas, differing ideas about gender can be very challenging, especially if a person hasn't thought about the issues of growing up male or female and how gender expectations affect day-to-day working relationships. This workshop invites students to think and dialogue on what gender is and on their own attitudes toward it.

Category:

Interpersonal development; relationship building; reflection.

Level:

Moderate to advanced

Recommended

Bonner Sequence: This training can be used at any time during the Bonner program but is recommended for Bonner students during the sophomore year in conjunction with the diversity awareness baseline/intention, if chosen by the campus. If that goal is not explored at that time, this workshop is also excellent for upper-class students, as a way of building gender awareness.

expectation	explore	experience	example	expertise
VALUES: community building, diversity, social justice				

Type:

Structured activity suitable for workshop (e.g. retreat or training) or reflection meeting

Focus or Goals of this Guide:

- Participants will establish and participate in an appropriate context to think critically about and evaluate attitudes and beliefs about gender.
- Participants will explore the nature of gender, developing a deeper sense of its nature, role, and manifestations in society.

- Through these activities, the sense of honesty, reflection, critical thinking, and openness in the community are fostered.

Materials:

- Several sheets of flip chart paper and markers
- Several stacks of Post-it notes
- Notebook paper
- Pencils or pens

How to Prepare:

This workshop is organized around leading participants through a series of activities and group exercises to initiate thought and dialogue on gender. While as the facilitator you may be informing, your most important job will be to guide participants through the exercises. Also be sure to read the workshop carefully and prep all materials needed for the activities.

Brief Outline:

The outline for this 90 to 120 minute workshop (which can be broken down into a few sessions) has the following parts:

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|---|------------------------------|
| 1) Opening Activity 1: Gender Post- It! | suggested time 15-20 minutes |
| 2) Opening Activity 2: When Did You First...? | Suggested time 15-20 minutes |
| 3) Defining & Recognizing Gender Conditioning | suggested time 15-20 minutes |
| 4) Activity 2: Real Women and Men | suggested time 20-30 minutes |
| 5) Is there a Group Consensus? | suggested time 15-20 minutes |

Part 1) Activity 1: Gender Post- It!

Suggested time: 15-20 minutes

To start the workshop, ask one female and one male participant to join you at the front of the room. An alternative is to do this with two poster-size flip charts with a “gendered” drawing of a man and a woman (appropriate stick figures will do). While getting several stacks of post-it notes and pencils ready, ask the remaining participants in the audience to take a post-it note and write the first thing that comes to their minds about the female and male participant volunteers beside you, assuming that they have never meet these people before. Also, point out that they can write as many comments as they want, but there should be one comment per post-it and can be about their jobs, favorite movies, hobbies, what sports they enjoy, etc. Instruct them to post the notes directly on to the volunteers.

While participants are posting, post 2 sheets of flip chart paper on a wall or board.

After about 15 minutes, ask participants to return to their seats. Write *man* on one flip chart sheet and *woman* on another. Take the post-its off the male volunteer and post them on the *man* sheet, reading the comments as you do this. Do the same for the female volunteer on the *woman* sheet.

Once finished, ask the volunteers to return to their seats and began the next section.

Part 2) Activity 2: When Did You First...?

Suggested time: 15-20 minutes

A second activity (which may be done in addition to or instead of the first) is more personal in nature. Have people break into pairs and share their responses to the following question:

- When did you first realize that you had a “gender” – in other words, that you were a “girl” or a “boy” or “female” or “male”? Share some stories about your own evolving awareness of gender?

Part 3) Defining & Recognizing Gender Conditioning

Suggested time: 15-20 minutes

From the list of post-its on the flip charts, help the audience identify trends in their assumptions that would support the idea that their assumptions were influenced by notions of a “man’s” behavior traits or a “woman’s” behavior traits.

For instance, for any assumption of the male, ask why a woman couldn’t do or be that. Or for a woman’s suggestion, ask the same of a man.

- Example: If someone writes that the female volunteer is “pretty” and that the male volunteer is handsome, ask why the male couldn’t be called “pretty” or the female “handsome.” Or if someone wrote that the male volunteer watches or plays a lot of sports, ask why this wasn’t assumed for the female volunteer.

Find as many of these assumptions as possible and ask why they were not suggested for the other participant.

Then, lead into the group inquiry:

So, what is gender?

After identifying these assumptions, explain that many of these assumptions for the male and female volunteer were socially conditioned responses to what we see as gender. Essentially we have been told since birth that boys and men are suppose to act, think, dress, talk, walk, eat, etc different from girls and women and vice versa.

Go on to define gender as a categorization based on sex that places people into two groups: male and female. These two groups are often biologically, sociologically, psychologically, and physiologically influenced.

However, despite the multi-influenced nature of gender, our society places a lot of weight on the physiological and biological nature of humans. While some may find their sociological and psychological orientations to be quite different from those defined by genitalia and outward appearance, the assignment of gender is generally based on the latter.

Present some additional theoretical background:

Aspects of gender

Explain: there are four aspects of gender: Assignment, Role, Identity, and Attribution.

- **Assignment:** The gender we are given at birth, either being male or female. In this aspect, our genders are prescribed by the society in which we are born.
- **Role:** This is the set of behaviors, mannerisms, and other traits that society says we should express as part of our assigned gender.
- **Identity:** This is what we think our gender should be at any given time. Many people do not question their gender and let their assigned gender function as their identity.
- **Attribution:** This is the gender we assign people when we first meet them and is based on a set of cues that differentiate from culture to culture.

Part 4): Real Women and Men

Suggested time: 20-30 minutes

After explaining gender, introduce the next activity.

Ask them to answer the following questions and jot the answers down in a journal or a piece of paper. Distribute paper and pencil for those who do not have it. (Suggested time: 10 minutes)

1. What is a “real” woman?
2. What is a “real” man?

Next, tell the participants to find 3-4 people who are of a different gender (or what you presently understand as gender), ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, and religious faith and ask them the same questions. Keep a record of their responses. (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

After 15 minutes, tell the participants to return to their seats for the next debrief.

Part 5) Is There a Group Consensus?

Suggested time: 20-30 minutes

Once participants have returned to their seats, ask them to examine all responses to the questions (including theirs) and answer these questions

(You may want to write these questions on flip chart paper for all to read, read them aloud, or pass out typed copies of the questions to each participant):

- Are there any similarities in the responses? Differences?
- What could these differences be attributed to?
- Can you develop a definition of “gender” that includes all responses to the question including yours?
- Is this difficult to do? Why?
- Finally, what does this reveal about gender?

After 10 minutes, ask the group to share some observations for each question. You may want to write these observations on flip chart paper for all to see. However, spend more with developing a definition of gender. This question may be the most difficult to get a group consensus on. Write as many suggestions as possible. Once this has been done, pose the last question to the participants to end the session:

- From the suggested definitions of gender listed, do you think that you are a “real” woman or man? Or does it even matter?
- What do these activities make you realize about gender?

Follow this with several minutes (or longer) of discussion, keeping in mind your role as an objective facilitator. Make sure the space remains safe and inclusive, reinforcing any needed ground rules.

Close with an evaluation, reflection, and/or next steps.