



Bonner Curriculum

# Deepening Gender Awareness

**BWBR Description:** Bonner Curriculum workshop guides participants through a reflect on and deeper appreciation for gender and its relationship to their work and experience.

**Overview:** The roles associated with gender influence each aspect of our lives. Our gender can affect everything from the clothes we wear to how we talk. As a continuation of *An Introduction to Gender Dialogue*, this workshop provides a structured setting in which participants can explore and discuss their own reflections about how gender has influenced their own behavior and interactions within the society at large. Through this sharing and dialogue, participants deepen their own self-awareness, as well as abilities for interpersonal relationships and working in a way that is aware of issues and biases.

**Category:** Interpersonal development; relationship building; reflection.

**Level:** Advanced

**Recommended Bonner Sequence:** This training (in conjunction with the Building Gender Awareness 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 deepening gender awareness. There are some programmatic elements within this training that overlap with the first training (including a repeat of the introduction of theory), so it may be helpful to read both and modify accordingly.

## Learning Outcomes:

- To provide participants with an analytical foundation to think critically about gender roles and behaviors that stem from such roles.

- To engage participants in dialogue about gender, its nature as socially and culturally constructed, and through that dialogue to deepen understanding and appreciation for the people's individualized experiences with gender and gender roles.
- To promote inclusion, openness, and communication about issues related to sex and gender (being male and/or female) and in so doing to provide a foundation for equitable treatment (in community) based on sex/gender.

### Materials:

- 1) Prepare signs to be posted in 4 corners of the room for the Four Corners exercise that read *Impossible, Maybe in Some Cases, Not Sure, and Completely Possible*
- 2) Have only half the number of seats for the number of participants you expect.

### How to Prepare:

To prepare for the workshop, read the guide carefully. Make sure that you feel comfortable with facilitating the exercises in an open and objective way.

### Brief Outline:

The workshop is organized around leading participants through a series of group activities and group discussions. However, as the facilitator, you will be responsible for identifying how the participants (especially in the opening exercise) successfully or unsuccessfully display gender roles based upon their designated color of blue or pink. If you are not familiar with how gender affects behavior, you may need to a little research before facilitating this workshop.

This 1-hour outline has the following parts:

- |   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1) "Pink and Blues" and Gender Conditioning | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 2) Review of Gender Theory                  | suggested time 5 minutes  |
| 3) Why is Gender So Important?              | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 4) Stand & Declare Dialogue                 | suggested time 20 minutes |
| 5) Small Group Discussion                   | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 6) Closing                                  | suggested time 5 minutes  |

### Part 1) "Pink and Blues" and Gender Conditioning

Suggested time: 10 minutes

As participants enter the workshop, randomly hand out slips of pink and blue paper or post-its. Try to give more blue strips to female participants and more pink strips to male participants. Provide tape so the participants can tape the strips on their chests. The colored slips will identify the socially appropriate gender the participant will have throughout the workshop. So blue = male and pink = female.

As the facilitator, during the warm up, you want to exhort the blues to act like blues (or men) and the pinks to act like pinks (women).

At the beginning of the workshop, introduce yourself and explain the focus of the session. You will also notice that half the participants are standing while the other half is sitting since you only provided half the number of needed seats. You are ready to begin the exercise.

Begin by pointing out that each participant has one of two colors, blue or pink. Then say something like:

*“I’m going to expect you to act like real blues and pinks in this workshop. But it already looks like some blues are not behaving like blues. There seems to be a few blues sitting while other pinks are standing. Be blues and let the pinks have a seat.”*

You can draw this out a bit more with other comments.

After letting the participants rearrange themselves, pose a question to the group: ***“When was the first time some told you boys or girls don’t do that?”***

Have participants break into pairs or small groups to share these stories with each other. (The storytelling is an important element of setting a tone of openness, listening, and sharing).

After folks have had a chance to share, ask for a few volunteers to share their stories. As them to explain who made the comment, how it made them feel, and how they adjusted their behavior. As the facilitator, feel free to share your experiences as well.

Continue and present a conception of gender to be used for this session:

- Gender is the sexual or sex-based category assigned to a person (or animal). E.g., female or male.

Note a few things about this definition:

- Gender is determined at birth.
- Gender is expected to remain static (unchanging) throughout a lifetime (with the exception of so-called hermaphrodites).
- Gender roles are expectations about behavior based on gender.

If you want, brainstorm some with the group. (Examples for men might be: being polite to women, opening doors, letting them sit first, wearing blue (as babies); for women: deferring to boys/men, playing with dolls, wearing pink (as babies)).

You can also ask people, “What can happen to an individual when she/he doesn’t behave as prescribed/according to that gender?”

## **Part 2) Review of Gender Theory**

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Once discussion dies down, explain that you will present some more theory about what gender is and four aspects of gender.

An expanded definition of gender:

Gender is the sexual or sex-based category assigned to a person (or animal). It is a categorization 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. At birth, biological characteristics (e.g., penis or vagina) determine the individual's categorization as male or female—and this is not expected to change.

### *Aspects of gender*

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 3) Small Group Brainstorm**

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Dividing the group up by any method you choose and into any number of groups appropriate and manageable, pose a question for the groups to discuss: *Why is gender so important in our society?*

After about 7 minutes, have each group present their top three explanations. Encourage groups to use explanations no other group has used in its presentation.

### **Part 4) Four Corners**

Suggested time: 20 minutes

[ALSO SEE THE TWO ALTERNATIVE EXERCISES BELOW].

Now, have all participants stand. Make the following statement several times so each participants understands:

***“It is possible to live without gender or to be gender neutral.”***

Then ask if they think it is:

- 1) Impossible
- 2) May be possible in some cases
- 3) Not sure
- 4) Completely possible

Now ask participants to choose the corner of the room with the appropriate sign that expresses their opinion of Impossible, Maybe possible in some cases, Not sure, or Completely possible.

Have each group meet and discuss why they had that opinion based on the statement. Explain that each group should develop a set of rationales that clarify their position. Ask them to keep in mind that two people may share the same response for difference reasons, and to try to represent both the main (dominant) and divergent (not-dominant) ideas in the group.

After ten minutes, have each group present its thinking.

Set some ground rules for group dialogue (if you haven't). [See the complete Stand and Declare workshop for Ground Rules].

Then allow for groups to ask each other questions and/or challenge each other's thinking (according to ground rules). Invite discussion where it is appropriate. After about ten minutes, invite group members to change position and move to another group.

## **Part 5) Closing Time**

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Wrap up by reviewing some of the main themes and arguments throughout the workshop.