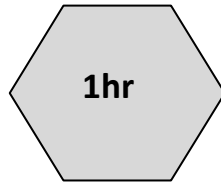


# An introduction: Sex and Gender

**Time**



**Purpose**

To surface the difference between sex (or biological differences) and gender (or social constructs that differentiate men and women); to introduce the concept of social constructs and where they come from.

**NOTE:** This exercise is an alternative methodology to the exercises in the GED manual, module 4, exercises 3 and 4

## Preparation

1. 2 flip charts with the word “Man” on them on the floor at one side of the room; 2 flip charts with the word “Woman” on them on the floor at the other side of the room.  
(note, you might need more or less paper depending on how many participants)
2. Plenty of pens around the flip charts (enough for one per participant)

## Process

1. Explain to the participants that we are going to start to explore the concept of gender which is one aspect of diversity; it is important to CARE because of our vision and mission.
2. If it is a sensitive topic (or if you sense some discomfort) remind the participants to draw on their own experience of being a power down or of difference when exploring the issue of gender (draw on the learning from previous sessions). Remind them that we are in awareness mode. Remind participants that we are not going to judge but explore.
3. Explain that you have put some flip chart paper marked ‘Man’ at one end of the room, and ‘Woman’ at the other end of the room.
4. Invite the participants to write any word that they associate in their context with the title (man or woman) on the paper. Any word that is ‘typical’ under that heading is fine. Note: it is good to encourage some participants to put at least some biological words on the paper (such as moustache, breast, womb, testicles), but otherwise ANY word is OK.

5. Give participants a 10 minutes to do this (remember encourage all the men and women to write on any flip charts). There is often a lot of interest in the papers, but encourage people to write.
6. When they are done, bring the four flip charts together at the centre of the room and invite people to stand around them.
7. Read out the words on the flip charts under man (or woman), ask the participants what they notice.
8. Read out the words on the flip charts under woman (or man) and ask the participants what they notice. What do they notice when looking at the two sets of flip charts.
9. Ask the participants for words that might relate to biological difference (this can be a 'teaching moment', because sex is not always obvious – there are many examples of children born where the sex is not clear; there are examples also of adults – such as Caster Semanya the South Africa runner, where 'gender tests' were inconclusive). Explain that when we talk about gender, we are not referring to the biological differences between the sexes; but the other words.
10. Ask where the other words come from, who taught us these words in relation to women and men. The answers might be:
  - a. Family
  - b. Friends
  - c. Media (magazines, films)
  - d. School/teachers
  - e. Neighbors (community)
  - f. Religion
  - g. Etc.

Explain that the other words are social constructs. Ask the participants what they think about this; what observations they have.

11. Ask what might happen if we moved some words across from the man page to the woman page; or vice versa. What happens when men do things that women 'should do' in a given society or family? What are the consequences? Why? How does this make them feel?

### **Facilitator's tips**

- Note that participants often notice a lot of things depending on the context, here are some examples:
  - All the words about men are aggressive and negative, but the ones about women are nice and positive.
  - There is a lot of violence on the 'man's page'.

- The social constructs might be different in different contexts or with different people; or if our grandparents/parents/children did the same exercise; so norms change over time
  - That the social constructs affect both men and women
  - This exercise is a key foundational piece that we would like all our staff to have access to!
- Some participants might mix up biological and social differences. Some people insist that 'looking after children' (for example) is 'naturally a woman's' affair – allow this to surface, suspend judgment and ask what others feel (sometimes you don't need to ask!!!)
- Participants notice that things change in different contexts, are different for different people and change over time. This is good. Remind them that we are in 'awareness' and encourage them to notice what they are learning about themselves.
- Sometimes this exercise can be an 'aha moment' for some participants as another participant challenges their perceptions and ideas. This is a demonstration of how exploring something in a 'safe space' can lead to greater self-awareness or change.
- The key to this exercise is to suspend judgment as a facilitator – encourage participation and openness. Get people to feel comfortable with noticing how social norms affect them as men/women or 'other'.