



**Gender
Awareness** and
Transformation for
Equality

BASIC INTRODUCTION TO GENDER TOPICS



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1. SEX-GENDER SYSTEM

The sex-gender system is one of the main systems of social organisation. Gayle Rubin in 1975 defines it as a set of socio-cultural devices by which a society transforms females and males into men and women, dividing them into two opposing, hierarchical and incomplete social categories that are presented as complementary.

THIS SYSTEM IS

Arbitrary: It is a cultural mechanism, not a natural one, which decides to assign one sex (or certain sexual characteristics) to one gender or another.

Binary: The sex-gender system, in our cultural system, is binary, it determines two socialisation boxes into which we must fit. But obviously reality is much more diverse, complex and rich than this binary pattern of social organization. This system leaves out all these diversities that do not fit into these two boxes.

Hierarchical: Both genders (male and female) do not relate to each other as equals, but the masculine is ALWAYS (within the system) above the feminine. The masculine is the reference, the most valued, the best, and so are the attributes that are assigned to this gender with respect to the other.

But is everything limited to this binary and hierarchical system? There is a much more diverse, complex and rich reality than this pattern of social organization. How diverse is it? Let ,s see.

Gender identity: how do you feel about yourself? It is the way we perceive ourselves: *Woman (Cis-trans) / man (cis-trans) / queer.*

People whose gender identity is consistent with the gender assigned at birth are considered *cisgender*. In other words, these subjects do not identify with transgenders. Being cisgender encompasses an alignment between gender identity, anatomical sex, and behavior according to anatomical gender.

Gender is considered one of the most influential sources of personal identity. Identification with one gender or another occurs from the age of 2 and from then on gender socialization occurs rapidly and it is very difficult to change acquired gender norms.

Gender expression: is the way you express your gender and is based on traditional gender roles. The way you dress for example.

Feminine / androgynous / masculine

Sex: physical-biological characteristics. Genitals, hormones, chromosomes.

Female / Intersex / Male.

Sexual orientation: who do you feel attracted to?

Hetersexual / bisexual / asexual / pansexual / homosexual / demisexual

How do I call or name each of these people? By him, by her, by them, by the name of the document or by the one presented? The important thing is to **ask, listen and respect what each person says** about themselves.

2. NORMS OF THE SEX-GENDER SYSTEM AND THE CONTROL

The sex-gender system imposes on us that if we are interpreted as females at birth, because of our sexual characteristics, we must behave in a feminine way from then on, and it is taken for granted that our sex-affective relationships are going to be with men. The same is attributed to people considered male, as indicated in the following table:

| SEX | MALE | FEMALE |
|-------------------------------|------------|----------|
| Gender | Man | Woman |
| Assigned role | Masculine | Feminine |
| Sexual affective Relationship | with woman | with men |

The sex-gender system is deeply rooted in our belief system and there are mechanisms of control of these norms, which are expressed in the many different forms of violence when this norm is not fulfilled:

Transphobia: is the social control system to make people assume the gender that corresponds to their assigned sex.

Is the irrational fear of gender non-conformity or gender transgression, such as a fear of, or aversion to, masculine women, feminine men, cross-dressers, transgenderists, transsexuals, and others who do not fit into existing gender stereotypes about their birth gender¹.

Plumophobia: is the social control system that makes people behave as expected for their gender, regardless of their sexual orientation. It punishes "rude" women or sensitive, „effeminate“ men, for example.

Homophobia: is the social control system for people to have sexually affective relationships with the opposite sex. Heterosexuality is taken for granted, it is the norm.

Homophobia is the irrational fear of and **aversion** to homosexuality and to lesbian, gay and bisexual people based on prejudice². Although it is called phobia, it is more connected to the feelings and behaviors of hate against the discriminated people, resulting in violence.

1 <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1414?lang=en>

2 <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1243>

3. GENDER STEREOTYPES

This gender system socializes people in two distinct and opposing ways, attributing different characteristics to one box or the other.

Furthermore, male attributes have historically been, and still are, the most socially valued, those linked to success. On the other hand, the characteristics related with the feminine have not been valued or recognized, and are not still.

Some of the attributes or characteristics related to masculine and feminine are, for example:

| MASCULINE | FEMININE |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| Strength | Gentleness |
| Reason | Emotion |
| Independence | Dependence |
| Productive work | Reproductive work |
| Mind | Body |
| Science | Nature |
| Intelligence | Beauty |
| Courage | Prudence |
| Public | Private |

All these characteristics and many more are instilled in people from before birth through all channels of socialization: language, school, the media, art, advertising, work, etc. This socialisation system teach us to comply with the sex-gender system as a whole.

In order to control people's compliance with their gender role, gender-based violence is used, among other mechanisms.

A stereotype is harmful when it **limits people's capacity to develop their personal abilities and self**, pursue their desires, their professional careers and make choices about their lives and life plans.

An example of this is the failure to criminalize marital rape, based on the stereotype of women as the sexual property of men. Another example is the failure of the justice system to hold perpetrator of sexual violence accountable, based on stereotypical views about women's appropriate sexual behaviour.

HOW DO GENDER STEREOTYPES / DOES STEREOTYPING HARM PEOPLE?

These stereotypes affect and constrain everybody, as they limit our complete and free development, no matter your gender identity. The difference is that if you are considered by the socialization system as a *man*, you will have many more privileges and rank than other gender identities.

Discrimination and violence against women and other gender identities include differences of treatment because of stereotypical expectations, attitudes and behaviours towards them.

3. GENDER STEREOTYPES

Some of the effects of this socialization process on people are the expectation of fitting in one of the 2 boxes, in a large variety of moments in life.

SUBJECT

Women - They are the „other“, the “second sex“, in the language of fact they do not even need to be mentioned. They exist only to complete and please the subject in law (man).

Men - They are the protagonists, the center, the subject of law.

CHARACTERISTICS IN CHILDHOOD

Women- From a young age they have to be good, discreet, responsible, quiet, obedient, affectionate, caring, kind, charming, etc. If not, they will be punished and singled out.

Men- They have to be champions, strong, brave, tough. They can be more nervous, active, being much less sanctioned, because it is „the natural thing to do“. If they don't comply, they are sanctioned, insulted as if they were girls, girls (inferior gender).

ROMANTIC LOVE

Women- They have to be liked, they have to be attractive to men, charming, funny and even „daring“ to attract them. Moreover, they have to wait, not take the initiative in relationships.

Women are brought up to be completed by the love and companionship of a man. That is why we must make sure that, if there is a man around us, he is well, has the necessary attention, is

satisfied and proud because we want him to want to stay with us. Even so, in the ideology we are „saved“ by the love of men.

Men- They have to conquer, to take the initiative in love. They have clear priorities, tastes and desires.

PROTAGONISM

Women- They have to please, serve, help and support men in their processes, problems, difficulties and most difficult moments in life.

Men- They put their problems and life processes at the center, they consider them to be the most important and therefore they need to be taken care of.

REQUIREMENTS

Women- They have to be: independent, responsible, hard-working, beautiful, attractive, successful at work, know different languages, good studies, be good mothers, good partners, good housewives, cheerful, always available for others, take care of everyone (siblings, fathers and mothers, daughters and sons, grandmothers and grandfathers, etc.) and constantly meet everyone's needs. They can always do more, one more thing, „it costs me nothing“.

Men- They have to be selfish and focus on their own interests, personal motivations and professional success. If it doesn't suit them or they simply don't feel like doing it, they have no social obligation to care, support, sustain, etc. They cannot be vulnerable or express any emotions.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Women- Women and girls are often unclear about their tastes, desires and motivations. Many women confuse helping others as personal self-fulfillment and prefer to please others and make others feel good as a way of being good to themselves.

Men- They have clear priorities, tastes and desires.

4. PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy is a system in which the masculine predominates over the feminine and has meant, throughout history, the dominance and power of men over women, non-binary people, children and nature. To control this power, men have exercised different forms of violence control and domination, including gender-based violence, to ensure that women do not reverse gender roles.

When we talk about fighting the heteropatriarchal system, we talk about valuing the attributes associated with the female gender that can help us change our society.

To improve and transform the heteropatriarchal model that is based on competition, capitalism, consumption, destruction of the earth, and a system in which multiple axes of oppression predominate, such as machism, racism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, transphobia, sexual violence, etc. We are talking about making visible and highlighting other ways of living, other models.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

As the United Nations points out “gender inequality is the most pervasive form of inequality around the world and a pressing human rights concern³”. Progress on gender equality is fundamental for realizing human

rights for all, creating and sustaining peaceful societies, and building socially inclusive and sustainable development trajectories where the benefits of development are equitably shared.

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5. INTERSECTIONALITY

Kimberlé Crenshaw, an North American law professor who coined the term in 1989 explained Intersectional feminism as, “a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other”⁴.

Intersectional feminism centers the voices of those experiencing overlapping, concurrent forms of oppression in order to understand the depths of the inequalities and the relationships among them in any given context⁵.

“We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What’s often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts,” Kimberlé Crenshaw said.

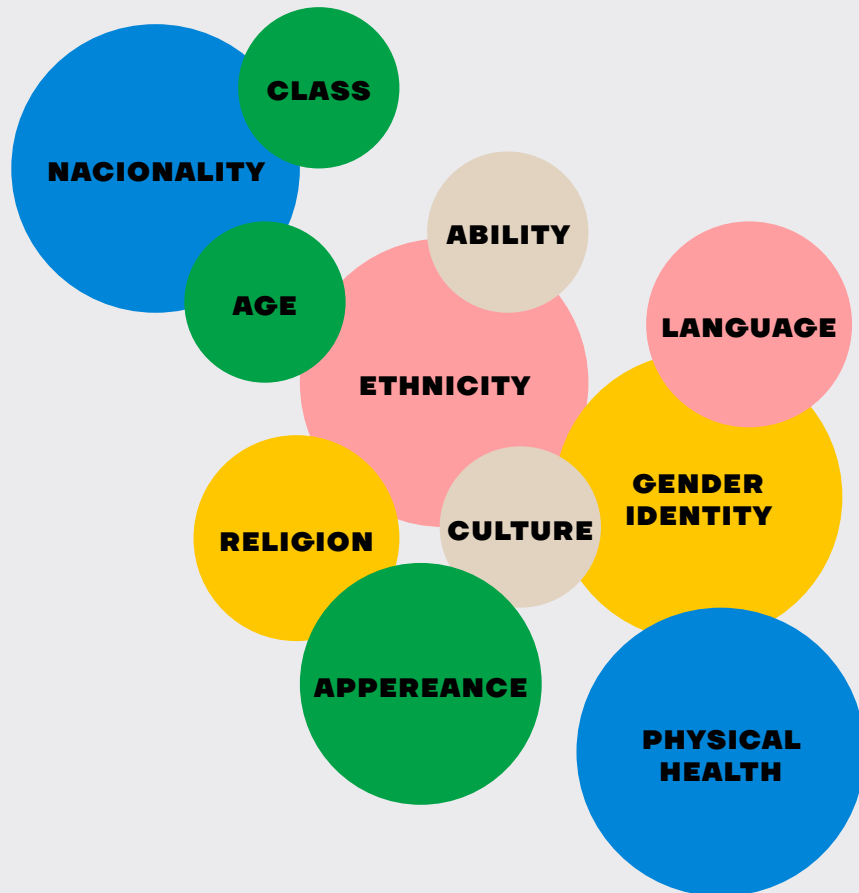
3 <https://sdgs.un.org/statements/sweden-11630>

4 <https://un.dk/intersectional-feminism-what-it-means-and-why-it-matters-right-now/>

5 Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989)

5. INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality is seen as the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage⁶; a theoretical approach based on such a premise.



Intersectionality is an analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which sex and gender intersect with other personal characteristics/identities, and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of discrimination.⁷

But it is not only theoretical. The importance relies in integrating this perspective in our everyday life.

How can we include intersectionality in our everyday life?⁸

RECOGNIZE DIFFERENCES

It is easier to believe that “all women are” or that “LGBTQ+ people believe or feel” in a certain way, but this does not reflect reality. We must recognize that all unique experiences of identity, and particularly ones that involve multiple overlapping oppressions, are valid.

Do not shy away from recognizing that people experience the world differently based on their overlapping identity markers. People are sometimes uncomfortable naming another person’s perceived race or asking for someone’s preferred pronouns. However, it is important to recognize these identities as a way to step beyond our assumptions that our experience is common.

6 Oxford Dictionary

7 <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1263>

8 <https://www.ywboston.org/2017/03/what-is-intersectionality-and-what-does-it-have-to-do-with-me/>

5. INTERSECTIONALITY

AVOID OVERSIMPLIFIED LANGUAGE.

Once we recognize this difference, we can move away from language that seeks to define people by a singular identity.

ANALYZE THE SPACE YOU OCCUPY.

Becoming comfortable recognizing differences also involves recognizing when that difference is not represented in the spaces you occupy. Diversity of all kinds matter in your workplace and in all the spaces you are part of. Be conscious of the welcoming or distancing practices of the spaces you frequent.

SEEK OTHER POINTS OF VIEW.

Explore the narratives of those with different identities and realities than you. Take the opportunity to listen to their experiences and points of views.

6. GENDER MAIN-STREAMING⁹

Gender mainstreaming means integrating a gender equality perspective at all stages and levels of policies, programmes and projects.

Women, men and other gender identities have different needs, living conditions and circumstances, including unequal access to and control

over power, resources, human rights and institutions, including the justice system.

Their situations also differ according to country, region, age, ethnic or social origin, or other factors. The aim of gender mainstreaming is to take into account these differences when designing, implementing and evaluating policies, programmes and projects, so that they benefit all gender identities and do not increase inequality but enhance gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming aims to solve –sometimes hidden– gender inequalities. It is therefore a tool for achieving gender equality.

7. VIOLENCE AS A RELATIONSHIP MODEL

The pyramid of sexist violence is a graphic representation in which a relationship is established between extreme physical violence and other more invisible forms of violence. Through the subtle forms of violence, the most extreme forms of violence are consolidated and made possible to emerge and become naturalized.¹⁰

The patriarchal system is based on violence to control and keep the inequalities for centuries and centuries. To have control of their power, different forms of violence and domination have been exercised – by men, institutions, persons in dominant roles, in work spaces, etc.– to ensure that people do not reverse gender roles.

9 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/what-is-gender-mainstreaming>

10 <https://virtualpsychcentre.com/the-pyramid-of-male-violence/>

7. VIOLENCE AS A RELATIONSHIP MODEL

Moreover, one of the main characteristics connected with masculinity is violence; and as masculinity is the most valued gender role in our patriarchal system, violence is too. Our socialization system of hierarchy and power is based on domination and violence.

This is also why we are thought to be attracted to violence since we are little:

- Men are educated in this system of domination and power to be violent: they relate with others through violence, violence means power and social prestige. They naturalize the exercise of different types of violence, and having violent attitudes reinforces their belonging to the “men crew”.
- Women learn to tolerate, and even more, to be attracted to this violent role: violence, domination and control are naturalized and synonymous with love and attraction.

The forms of violence expressed at the base of the pyramid, although they are less extreme or visible, were not less serious. These forms of violence affect people’s lives and the way they perceive and relate to each other.

They sustain and allow the most extreme violence to occur. Allowing, tolerating and normalizing this daily violence is what makes possible the reinforcement of gender inequality and the consolidation of men holding more power than women and other gender diversities.

