

# ***SPORT AGAINST GENDER INEQUALITY***

## ***Background Reading Material for Activity Workbook 3 Developing Practical Understanding of Gender***

This background reading material is a component of Activity Workbook 3 part of the Sport Against Gender Inequality (SAGI) online resource pack. Instructors must ensure that they read this document in detail before planning and delivering the session.

It is often assumed that sex and gender are the same. However, gender is the result of human production that is constantly produced and re-produced through our social interactions (West and Zimmerman, 1987). People are born male or female but learn to be boys and girls who grow up into men and women. The meaning of the word 'gender' refers to the definition of men and women in their socio-cultural context. The manner in which social roles and expectations of behavioural patterns are passed on to men and women is known as 'engendering'. There is a clear distinction between sex and gender. We are born either one sex or the other: male or female. After birth, social and cultural traditions, often completely out of sync with today's world, start the process of 'gendering' that slowly transforms a male or female into a man or a woman with qualities and roles to suit a specific society.

[1] [https://www.gla.ac.uk/0t4/crcees/files/summerschool/readings/WestZimmerman\\_1987\\_DoingGender.pdf](https://www.gla.ac.uk/0t4/crcees/files/summerschool/readings/WestZimmerman_1987_DoingGender.pdf)

Therefore, while sex is biological, gender slots men and women into a pre-determined social and cultural classification.

Understanding this difference between sex and gender is essential to comprehend how socialization processes in every society affect men and women and lead them to play different roles, have different needs and face different constraints. While biological differences are natural and constant, gender differences, by virtue of being socially constructed, are not constant. Every society classifies children as 'girls and boys' and adults as 'women and men', although what constitutes gender may vary from culture to culture, from one social group to another and over different periods of times. For example, the movements of a girl belonging to a city or town may be confined to her home and school but on the contrary, the movement of a tribal (indigenous) girl living in a remote village may not be so limited and she is free to roam around in the jungles or climb trees.

They are both girls, but because of the difference in their upbringing, they each develop very different capabilities, aspirations, and dreams, in spite of the fact that their bodies are similar. The process of gendering and its outcome are legitimated by the major institutions which structure our societies including religion, law, science, and social values. Gender is therefore a dynamic concept. It varies greatly from one culture to another, and from one social group to another within the same culture.



Race, class, economic situation and age all influence what is culturally appropriate for men and women. However, over a period of time these gender roles within a society change.

The 'construction' of gender therefore needs to be understood as a social 'process'. As a 'process', gender creates the social differences that define 'man' and 'woman'. One may be born a female, and their entire life can be spent living up to the socially prescribed ideals of being a 'woman'. It is these expectations of being female (a human with certain physical features like vagina, mammary glands, etc.) and therefore being a woman (a human who is gentle, caring, etc.) that forms the basis of the confusion between an individual's sex and the expected gender roles to be played out. The social and the cultural expectations associated with our biological sex become our gender roles. See the table below for a summary of the key differences between sex and gender.

### **SEX**

- Sex is natural
- Sex is biological. It refers to visible differences in genitalia and related differences in procreative function
- Sex is constant, it remains the same everywhere
- Sex cannot be changed

### **GENDER**

- Gender is socio-cultural and it is man-made
- Gender is socio-cultural and it refers to masculine and feminine qualities, behaviour patterns, roles and responsibilities etc.
- Gender is variable, it changes from time to time, culture to culture, even family to family
- Gender can be changed

## Beyond the Binary

Gender is socially constructed, learned and acquired. Also, the patriarchal construction of gender has been such that it has rendered it into a binary, where only male and female gender are seen as the most acceptable and normal. This normalisation of male and female binary has systematically led to the rejection of and making invisible all those genders that do not fit within the binary and serve the goal of upholding the institution of compulsory heterosexuality.

People with non-binary identities have been popularly addressed as LGBTQIA, which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual/ Aromantic/ Agender.

People with non-binary identities contend that since both gender and sexual identity are learned and acquired, there are many people who fail to live up to a patriarchal socialisation of a compulsory heterosexuality. Many men find themselves sexually attracted towards other men, many women find themselves sexually attracted towards other women; many people do not want to conform to any of the gender identities and some do not have any sexual inclinations. Also, there are many people who feel that the sex they were assigned at birth doesn't match their gender identity. There are also people whose reproductive organs (or bodies) do not fall neatly into either of the two sex categories of male or female.

The 'Hijra' or 'Kinnar' community in India is one such example. Some people are born intersex i.e. they have reproductive organs of both male and female.

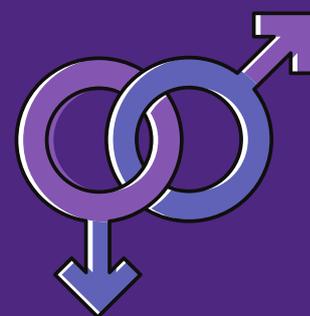
It is also important to remember that the opposite of a compulsory heterosexuality is not homosexuality. Not all non-binary or non-confirming gender and sexual identities are homosexual. Homosexuality means when two people with the same sex are attracted to each other, a term that is regularly used to refer to lesbians and gays. There are many other identities on the LGBTQIA continuum that are not homosexual.

The following glossary will help in understanding the continuum and to better inform our understanding of gender and sexuality.



**Queer:** Originally used as a pejorative slur, queer has now become an umbrella term to describe the myriad ways people reject binary categories of gender and sexual orientation to express who they are. People who identify as queer embrace identities and sexual orientations outside of mainstream heterosexual and gender norms.

**Gay:** A sexual orientation that describes a person who is emotionally or sexually attracted to people of their own gender; commonly used to describe men.



**Lesbian:** A woman who is emotionally or sexually attracted to other women.

**Bisexual:** A person who is emotionally or sexually attracted to more than one sex or gender.

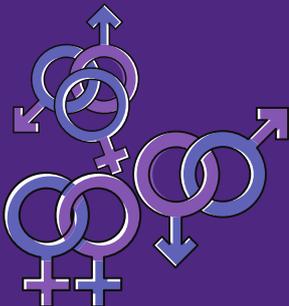


**Pansexual:** A person who can be attracted to all different kinds of people, regardless of their biological sex or gender identity.



**Asexual:** A person who experiences no sexual attraction to other people.

**Demisexual:** Someone who doesn't develop sexual attraction to anyone until they have a strong emotional connection.

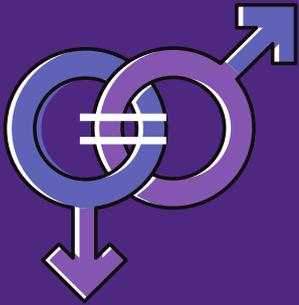


**Same-gender loving:** A term some in the African-American community use instead of lesbian, gay or bisexual to express sexual attraction to people of the same gender.

**Aromantic:** A person who experiences little or no romantic attraction to others.

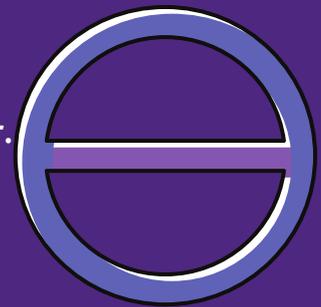


**Transgender:** A person whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.



**Cisgender:** A person whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Agender:** Someone who doesn't identify as any particular gender.



**Gender-expansive:** An umbrella term used to refer to people, often times youth, who don't identify with traditional gender roles.

**Gender fluid:** Not identifying with a single, fixed gender. A person whose gender identity may shift.



*Note: While the previous six terms may sound similar, subtle differences between them mean they can't always be used interchangeably.*

**S**PORTS

**A**AGAINST

**G**ENDER

**I**NEQUALITY

***Activity Workbook 3***  
***Reading Material***



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