

Unit 1: Defining Gender

Learning Objectives

What determines gender?

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Know the difference between gender and sex;
- Explain the difference between gender equity and equality;
- Describe the concept of gender blindness;
- Understand the nature and impact of gender discrimination.

Introduction and Overview

While sex is the biological difference between a man and a woman, gender encompasses the socially-constructed roles given to people of different sexes, often resulting in gender discrimination in everything from healthcare to education and career. As a result of gender roles, the potential decision-making power of girls and women are hindered, impacting the ability to protect themselves and their family and to earn a living, and on a grander national scale, to allow for true democracy, economic development and a world free from poverty, AIDS and other health and environmental disasters.

When gender equality is achieved, the playing field is leveled and children and adults are given the freedom to develop their natural talents (e.g. boys in arts, girls in engineering) through equal opportunity for education, healthcare, and the legal representation that prepares them for a better life.

What is Gender?

As we said, gender is much more than sex alone. It refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men, girls and boys, as well as among women and among men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed through socialization. They are context/time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in the level and type of responsibilities that are assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as opportunities for decision-making. As this unit will explain further, gender is a part of the broader socio-cultural context.

Equality between Women and Men

The old adages, men will be men and women will be women, become less relevant as the playing field, or as they are afforded equal opportunities. How men and women develop depends to a large extent on how equal are their rights, responsibilities and opportunities. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality refers to equal opportunities for all people and equally valued work done by all, irrespective of their sex. Equality between women and men is seen as a precondition for and indicator of sustainable, people-centered development.

Gender Equity

Unlike gender equality which demands equal treatment of people, gender equity refers to an acknowledgement that some groups in society are marginalized. Equity is the process of minimizing the unfairness. An example is the under-representation of women in politics. Equal representation cannot be instantly achieved without proactive policies, such as quotas, which are an attempt to minimize the inequality gap.

Gender Blindness

Both women and men can be disinclined to gender blindness accepting roles assigned by society as a justifiable basis for unequal treatment. The language used is often an indicator of gender blindness. In the past, people might have referred to the person leading discussions as "Chairmen," irrespective of whether the individual was a man or a woman. The underlying assumption was that only a man could lead a discussion, but experience shows that women are

Box 1: What's in a Word? Equality vs. Equity

Equality

Equality implies equal access. It is the notion that all (men) are created equal, before God and before the law setting up the powerful expectation that every citizen deserves the same opportunity to influence the course of democracy, and to benefit from the fruits of a good society. However when a society is stratified into poles of advantage and disadvantage, with the inevitable consequences of privilege and exclusion, the promise of equal access to the discourses necessary for democratic participation rings hollow. Fair access becomes more the *interpretation* of fairness as equal access and opportunity. Correspondingly, access to channels of communication and sources of information that is made available on even terms to all-a level playing field--is derived from the concept of fairness as uniform distribution, where everyone is entitled to the same level of access and can avail themselves if they so choose.

Equity

When some are excluded or lack the knowledge, income, equipment, or training necessary to participate fully in public discourse, they must overcome obstacles to access in order to ensure fairness. In other words, fairness also demands remedies to redress historic injustices that have prevented or diminished access in the first place. Just as there can be no fairness without equality, there can be neither without justice. **In order to maximize opportunities for access experienced by certain groups, a good society commits resources in order to level the playing field.** When libraries offer literacy programs, when schools offer courses in English as a second language, and when foundations target scholarships to students from poor families, they demonstrate a commitment to equity of access as fairness and as justice.

Equality vs. Equity

Policies that stress fairness as uniform distribution tend to succeed because they appear to entitle everyone and reinforce fairness as equality. Conversely, policies aiming to achieve equity face recurring challenges as "unfair." The United States' Affirmative Action policies (see box 9) that attempt to overcome generations of discrimination and injustice against women and minorities, became the law of the land without the approval of Americans, many of whom saw it as "unfair" because it appeared to favor some over others; and, thus, to negate the more commonly understood concept of fairness as equality and as uniform distribution.

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Source: <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oif/ifttoolkits/toolkitrelatedlinks/equalityequity.cfm>

equally capable of assuming that responsibility. The terminology here reflects the conditioning process whereby women are expected to be subordinate to men. A lack of gender blindness has implications for policies, which can continue to widen the gender equality gap unless it is explicitly recognized and addressed.

Gender-Based Discrimination

Gender equality refers to the equal treatment of people, but in most societies there are groups that are discriminated against on the basis of age, disabilities and sex. Gender based discrimination in the workplace is illustrated in an unjust division of labor denying some people the opportunity to perform certain tasks for which they are capable purely on the basis of gender. Access to and control over resources, for example schooling, scholarships, etc., for which many women are denied is a good indicator of gender-based discrimination and exacerbates the numbers of women who are poorer than men.

Glass Ceiling

The concept of a glass ceiling refers to the disproportionate presence of groups of people, such as women, at lower levels in the workforce and their absence at higher levels. The nursing and teaching professions are often examples of where the glass ceiling occurs. Women are employed in large numbers at the lower or middle levels, but they are often noticeably absent at the decision-making level. This is, in part, a reflection of the family socialization and conditioning process, which defers the decision-making responsibility to the man in the family.

Gender Analysis

Gender analysis entails a process of studying information to ensure that benefits of policies are equally distributed to all target groups. The study requires an understanding of the meaning of gender and the availability of gender disaggregated statistics.

Gender Mainstreaming

This is the public policy concept of assessing the different implications for women and men of any planned policy action, including legislation and programs, in all areas and levels. It is a process of ensuring that programs and projects in all institutions reflect the important priority of achieving equal opportunity for all people and acknowledging the existence of gender

Box 2: UN Gender Mainstreaming Good Practices

Documenting good practice examples on the mainstreaming strategy

A good practice example of gender mainstreaming could be actions which lead to a positive change in:

- Policies;
- Strategies / approach;
- Advocacy efforts;
- Legislation;
- Research and other analytical work;
- Statistics- greater sex disaggregation, improved gender analysis of data, or identifying gaps in the data base;
- Development of indicators and improved monitoring;
- Medium-term plans and budgets;
- Procedures and processes.

A good practice example could also document positive organizational changes necessary to promote gender mainstreaming, such as:

- Competence development on mainstreaming;
- Establishment of a gender unit or focal point with a clear mandate and necessary resources to promote and support mainstreaming;
- Indication of management commitment to mainstreaming;
- Establishment of accountability mechanisms;
- Development of guidelines, manuals, and other tools to support mainstreaming;
- Establishment of a resource base of relevant gender equality expertise for mainstreaming.

Source: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/goodpraexamples.htm>

inequality. It is a deliberate effort to reverse the level of inequality through allocation of resources and policies in order to provide greater benefits to the disadvantaged groups.

Socializing Institutions on Gender Difference

We have already droned in that gender is a social construct. But what does that mean? Who constructs our gender identities? Through our experiences with the media, interactions with people in our lives from our own family (mom and the girls do the dishes, dad and the boys tend the lawn) to service providers who have a hard time believing a woman is capable of being her own construction contractor social interactions put constraints on people depending on their gender. Different sexes are also socialized family, school, church, and in the workplace, to fulfill specific roles. These socializing institutions determine the attitudes society forms about men and women. Examining these institutions assists in helping understand the attitudes that determine gender differences.

Family

Family is where our first socializing occurs. It provides the foundation for attitudes and roles, often with women and girls expected to perfect their domestic skills while boys are encouraged to experiment with tools. This socialization process shapes and conditions different approaches to life that boys and girls will adopt. Family governance also includes decisions over intra-household resource allocation, inheritance and endowments. It is here where gender relationships of unequal power can have the most day to day impact on women - particularly for poor women and those who are not employed in income-generating activities outside the home

Box 3: Gender Role Theory

Social Scientist Talcott Parsons developed a model of the nuclear family in the 1950s, which was the most common family structure in the United States at that time. He compared the traditional model with a more modern, liberal model to illustrate extreme positions on gender roles.

	Model A – Total Role Segregation	Model B – Total Integration of Roles
Education	Gender-specific education; high professional qualification is important only for the man	Co-educative schools, same content of classes for girls and boys, same qualification for men and women.
Profession	The workplace is not the primary area of women; career and professional advancement is deemed unimportant for women	For women, career is just as important as for men; Therefore equal professional opportunities for men and women are necessary.
Housework	Housekeeping and child care are the primary functions of the woman; participation of the man in these functions is only partially wanted.	All housework is done by both parties to the marriage in equal shares.
Decision-making	In case of conflict, man has the last say, for example in choosing the place to live, choice of school for children, buying decisions	Neither partner dominates; solutions do not always follow the principle of finding a concerted decision.
Child Care and Education	Woman takes care of the largest part of these functions; she educates children and cares for them in every way	Man and woman share these functions equally

Box 4: Paternity Leave By Country

<i>Country</i>	<i>Paternity Leave</i>
Algeria	3 days
Argentina	2 weeks
The Bahamas	1 week
Brazil	5 days
Burma	6 days
Cambodia	10 days
Cameroon	10 days
Canada	55% up to \$413/week for 35 weeks parental leave (shared with mother)
Chad	10 days
Chile	4 days
Colombia	4-8 days
Cote d'Ivoire	10 days
Denmark	14 days
Djibouti	10 days
Estonia	14 days
Finland	18 days
France	2 weeks
Gabon	10 days
Germany	0 weeks
Guatemala	2 days
Hungary	5 days
Iceland	Equal to maternity
India	15 days
Indonesia	2 days
Italy	13 weeks
Latvia	10 days
Netherlands	3 days
Norway	35-45 weeks
Paraguay	2 days
Philippines	7 days
Portugal	3 weeks
Romania	5 days
Rwanda	2 days
Saudi Arabia	1 day
Seychelles	4 days
Slovenia	90 days
South Africa	3 days
Sweden	16 months
Switzerland	0 days
Togo	10 days
Tunisia	1-2 days
Turkey	3 days
United Kingdom	2 weeks
United States	0 days
Uruguay	3 days

Source: WikiCommons

In many parts of the world today the family structure has evolved to one in which both the husband and wife are employed full-time to provide the family with increased financial resources. Some argue that the traditional structure in which the woman stays home hinders a family by denying the family the ease that two incomes allow, while others believe that a parent at home provides essential care for children. The decision will clearly depend on the different family values, but childcare is not necessarily a biological role. The introduction of paternity leave in some high income countries allows fathers to assume co-responsibility of caring for their new born babies. In addition, the concept of the "stay-at-home-dad" has grown in popularity. For example, of the 187 participants at *Fortune Magazine's Most Powerful Women in the Business Summit*, 1/3 of the women's husbands were stay-at-home dads. In the United Kingdom there are more than 200,000 fathers who choose the role of stay at home dad and 140,000 in the United States.

Another aspect affecting family structure that poses a challenge to

gender-based privileges is the increasing number of female-headed households. While in some cases the decision for a female-headed household is by choice, in other cases such as war or disease, it is a necessity. In Rwanda, an estimated 50 percent of households are female-headed as a result of the decimation of the male population.

Workplace

The division of labor that starts at home extends to the workplace, where women are often expected to perform different functions than men. The perception of a man as the head of the household can also affect hiring policies and decisions in the workplace. When competing for employment, a man may have a greater chance of being offered a full-time or leadership position than a woman, especially if she is of childbearing age. Women are often discriminated against not because of their competence, but on the basis of the perception of possible family-related disruption to the employment, such as maternity leave, sick children, or in some cases, women are not perceived as capable of handling the job. As a result, many women may be employed as part-time workers and in lower paid positions. Less demanding responsibilities in the workplace could be viewed as a positive form of engagement because it frees up the time to attend to the needs of the family. However, the concomitant remuneration may actually account for much of the income differential between men and women. According to parliamentary staff in Ghana, gender-based discrimination was one of the reasons for a large proportion of Ghanaian women opting for self-employment. However, self-employment may also imply long working hours without health and pension benefits.

The horticulture industry in some countries provides examples of gender-based division of labor. For example, women are employed to plant, weed and pick flowers, while men typically drive tractors, weigh and pack flowers. Restricting women to less skilled tasks denies them access to the social mobility available to their male counterparts, thereby reinforcing their position in society and inhibiting their ability to move out of poverty. Furthermore, the exclusion of women from decision-making at higher levels perpetuates these gender-based differences in the work place. Pressure from international and domestic groups seeking more equality has resulted in women in the horticulture industry in Kenya undertaking work traditionally reserved for men, such as weighing and packing flowers and being recruited for management positions, illustrating that gender roles are made by society and can be changed by society.

Religion

Since religion is often the source of cultural beliefs about leadership, authority and values, it can

Box 5: Religious Ordination among Females

Buddhism - Women are currently and historically leaders in East Asia and Taiwan, India and Sri Lanka.

Catholic Church – Canon law states that "Only a baptized man validly receives sacred ordination."

Anglicanism – The majority of Anglican provinces ordain women as both deacons and priests and a few have consecrated women as bishops. The Episcopal Church in the United States ordains women as both priests and bishops.

Jehovah's Witnesses – Jehovah's Witnesses consider qualified public baptism to represent ordination.

Islam - Muslims do not formally ordain religious leaders

Judaism - Only men can become rabbis in Orthodox Judaism, but all other types of Judaism allow and have female rabbis.

Shinto - Ordination of women as Shinto priests has arisen after the abolition of State Shinto in the aftermath of World

offer a rationale for explaining cultural constraints on the role of women. The ordination of women is controversial in religions where either the rite of ordination, or the role that an ordained person fulfills, has traditionally been restricted to men because of cultural prohibitions or theological doctrines. The changing roles of women, both inside religious communities and in the broader public spheres, offers hope that these traditional constraints can be overcome. In some religions women are expected to be subservient to their husbands. Decision-making at home or in religious organizations is often reserved for men based on this tenet. The religious requirement for men to protect their families, including their wives, often excludes women from the right to own or control the use of family property.

In some respect, protection of the family by the head of the household is in the interest of the protected, however, it denies women an opportunity to acquire decision-making experience, which, in turn, acts as a further hurdle to women taking up decision-making positions within the family or in society more broadly.

Conclusion

Understanding the sources of unequal treatment of people in society and the need for gender equity are essential preconditions to tackling the ongoing inequity experienced by women. Biological differences are static, but social roles are dynamic and change with time. For instance, most cultures are changing due to globalization, but biological differences remain the same. These changing dimensions of gender are important for policy formulation because what society has made, society can change; what hampers change, though, in many instances is the fear of loss of benefits by those presently in privileged positions.

Unit 1 Questions

Please answer each of the following questions. If you are taking this course in a group you may then meet to discuss your answers.

1. What is the difference between gender and sex?
2. Provide an example of women in new leadership positions in your own community and the impact this has had on the social dynamic locally.
3. What particular challenges are faced by female heads of households?
4. Does being an FHH mean being more or less income poor than women who are economically supported by a male? Why?
5. Why is significant for a woman to be ordained as a religious leader? Where are the impacts felt?

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