

GENDER WORKSHOP

An SCM Workshop

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

This SCM workshop aims to help us explore our different understandings and experiences of gender within society and the church, and the connections between gender and justice. It's an introductory workshop which you could follow up with further discussion.

You will need some post it notes or stickers, pens, the gender definition handout (optional), Bibles or copies of the gospel text, and big pieces of paper.

INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES)

Ask each person to write a name on a post-it note or sticker without anyone else seeing. It can be a famous person, a fictional character, a biblical character or anyone else who is likely to be known by the group.

They should then fix the post-it/sticker to another person – ideally on their forehead (or some other part of the body where they will not be able to see it!). Each person must try to be the first to guess their identity – they can only ask yes/no questions e.g. Am I a famous actor? Am I in the Bible? Am I a woman? There is no need to take turns – it should be an energetic game!

ASK THE QUESTION(S) (10-15 MINUTES)

If your group is new to discussing gender issues you may want to start with an exploration of definitions of gender.

Sitting in a circle, ask each person to introduce themselves and say something briefly about their understanding of gender, using these two questions. How do you feel gender relates to your identity? How does gender affect our lives and/or the lives of others that we know?

Next, write the words 'sex' and 'gender' on a flipchart. Get the group to shout out words that they associate with each term, and write them up.

Here is a definition given by the World Health Organisation. Show it to the group or read it out.

"Sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. Aspects of sex will not vary substantially

between different human societies, while aspects of gender may vary greatly."

What does the group think about the concept of gender being a spectrum rather than an either/or category?

EXPLORE THE ISSUE(S) (30 MINUTES)

You can make this bit as long or short as you like by the number of statements you use! This is a good activity for bringing out different opinions within the group. It shouldn't turn into a debate; instead it should create a safe space where we listen to each other's explanations. Imagine a line down the middle of the room. At one end is the option 'strongly agree', and at the other end is the option, 'strongly disagree'. Read out a statement and ask participants to move to a position on the imaginary line. Once people have moved to their places, ask people in different positions to explain to the whole group why they chose as they did.

Suggested statements are below (feel free to add, subtract, or invent alternatives!)

Men and women are like creatures from different planets, and will never fully understand one another.

Men tend to be more logical and rational than women, whilst women are more relational and nurturing.

Men and women are very similar to one another because of our common humanity. Gender differences are exaggerated by society for political and social reasons.

Christianity and feminism are inherently at odds with one another; it is very difficult to be a Christian feminist.

Men and women are designed by God to have complementary roles in church and society – these roles are different but equal.

Next, read Mark 5: 21 – 34 – story of an unnamed woman who touches Jesus' cloak and is healed. Discuss these questions in small groups.

What barriers and prejudices would the woman have faced in her society? What do you think about her action and Jesus' response to her? Who might the 'unnamed' woman be in our world today?

INVITE THE RESPONSE (15 MINUTES)

The roots of Gender injustice (25 mins) Split into different small groups of 4 – 5. Each group needs a big piece of paper and some pens.

Split into different small groups of 4 – 5. Each group needs a big piece of paper and some pens. Ask each group to:

Draw a tree with roots and branches on your piece of paper. It can be as simple or as pretty as you like – but don't spend the whole session on it!

Think about and discuss the following questions, using the tree to record your discussions. You may find it difficult to decide whether something is a cause or a consequence, but let the group choose, or put it as both a cause and a consequence.

- What do you think gender injustice is? (write on the trunk of the tree)

You may want to try to define this term or think about it in different ways e.g. globally, within relationships, in the church etc

- What are the causes of gender injustice? (write on the roots of the tree)

If the groups get stuck – you could suggest some of the following: ingrained stereotypes, religious and cultural values and ideologies, patriarchy, media messages, sexism, enforced gender roles, historical inequality

- What are the consequences of gender injustice? (write on the branches)

If the groups get stuck – you could suggest the following: lack of participation, HIV transmission (women are disproportionately vulnerable), homophobia, domestic abuse, sex trafficking, wage inequality

When groups have got this far, ask them to share some examples with the whole group. (5 mins) Then ask the final question, for small group discussion (10 mins).

- What actions can we personally, and collectively, take to tackle the root causes of gender injustice, and to raise awareness of the consequences? Write a list in your group of all the suggested actions.

Encourage people to think practically.

CLOSING THE SESSION (5 MINUTES)

You can finish by reading a prayer or meditation. Here is one you could use:

*We were created in your image,
mysteriously and wonderfully made.
You looked on us and said 'This is good'.*

*You became human, lived with us
in the dirt and joy of everyday life.*

You looked on us and said 'Follow me'.

*Men and women, rich and poor, outcast and powerful
got caught up in your stories, your passion
you looked on us and said 'Peace I leave with you'.*

*You were angry, you cried, you celebrated, you healed,
you forgave, you died, you met us in the garden.
You looked on us and you knew our name.*

*We struggle, we follow, we question, we doubt,
we celebrate, we divide, we embrace, we fear, we love,
You look on us and we hear:*

*"There is no longer Jew or Greek,
there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male and female;
for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."*

Amen

FUTURE DISCUSSIONS AND MORE RESOURCES

If your group is interested in exploring this theme further, then you could try some of these topics for further discussions or invite a speaker. Get in touch with the SCM office if you need any help or resources (scm@movement.org.uk).

- *Christianity and feminism*
- *How to deal with 'Texts of Terror' – biblical stories of abuse/rape/violence*
- *Positive masculinity*
- *Recovering women's stories in the Bible*
- *God as Mother? – exploring gendered understandings of God*
- *Body Theology*
- *Rob Bell's Nooma DVD She: explores female imagery for God (the SCM office has a copy if you want to borrow it)*
- *Texts of Terror by Phyllis Trible*
- *Woman by Tina Beattie*
- *Memories of Bliss: God, Sex, and Us by Jo Ind*
- *Introducing Body Theology by Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart (eds.)*
- *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter by Sue Monk Kidd*
- *From Wild Man to Wise Man: Reflections on Male Spirituality by Richard Rohr (St Anthony Messenger Press 2005)*