

TIP SHEET

Intro to Gender

INTRODUCTION

This tip sheet was developed to provide WiSTEM²D volunteers with a basic overview of: (1) key concepts related to gender, to better understand the increasing diversity of the young people who may participate in this program, and (2) some of the deeper issues associated with gender and the broader effort to promote an inclusive and just society. Note that some of these concepts and issues may be sensitive in different cultures. We recommend that volunteers review all content carefully in advance, to decide which concepts may be sensitive and how to discuss them.

GENDER VS. SEX—WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?¹

We've all seen both of these words used in various ways, including on essentially every form we have to fill out. So, what do they actually mean?

Sex

Sex refers to the *biological* differences between females and males.

- Sex differences are universal and permanent (for the most part—see next section under Transgender).
- Data are disaggregated by sex, not by gender.
- Gender and sex are not synonyms for each other.

 **Example:** One would correctly refer to a baby's sex, not gender.

- Sexual Orientation is “one’s enduring sexual attraction to male partners, female partners, or both. Sexual orientation may be heterosexual, same sex (gay or lesbian), or bisexual.”²

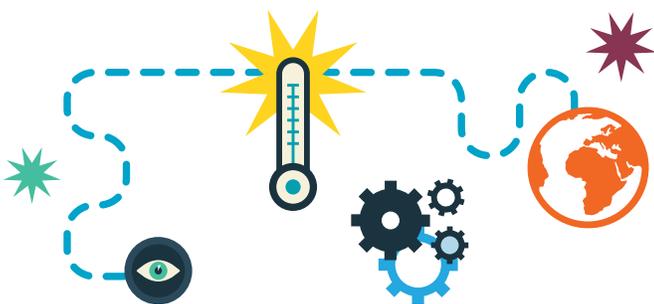
Gender

Gender has to do with societal expectations regarding how females and males should behave and the roles they play in different cultures with respect to each other.

- Gender varies across cultures, is dynamic, and can change over time (*masculinities, femininities*).
- Gender is a *social* construct that refers to relations between the sexes based on their relative roles in the family and in society.
- It encompasses the economic, political, and socio-cultural attributes, constraints, and opportunities associated with being male or female.

 **Example:** In many countries, the female gender is expected to take care of the house, and the male gender is expected to repair things that are broken. Of course, this varies between and even within countries.

- Gender Identity refers to a person’s *internal*, deeply felt sense of being a man or woman, or something other or in between, that may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth.



- Gender Expression refers to all of the *external* characteristics and behaviors that are socially defined as either masculine or feminine—such as dress, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions. A person’s gender expression may or may not match his/her gender identity or his/her biological sex.
- Transgender refers collectively to people who challenge strict gender norms by behaving as “effeminate” men or “masculine” women, adapting “third gender” roles (see below), or embarking on hormonal and surgical treatment to adjust their bodies to the form of the desired sex. When individuals feel their gender and sex do not match—which is known “gender dysphoria”—they may decide to physically transition their sex from male to female, or vice versa.⁴ While sex is thus generally permanent, in such situations, it may be changed.
 - Transgender may also include transsexuals (an older, medical-focused term for individuals with gender dysphoria who have had or plan to have surgery to align their sex with their gender identity)⁵ and intersex persons (people who are born with sexual anatomy that is neither exclusively male nor exclusively female; however, the majority of intersex individuals do not experience gender dysphoria or identify as transgender)⁶.
 - Third gender refers to a gender construct that is non-binary, i.e. neither female nor male or perhaps somewhere in between. Some people feel that those two categories do not capture who they are. The concept of third gender is culturally and individually contextual. The category might also be preferred by a transgender or other individual who simply does not wish to identify as a woman or a man. For one example, see: <https://thesocietypages.org/trot/2018/07/03/gender-identity-and-pakistans-third-gender/>.
- Gender Equality is the state or condition that affords women and men equal enjoyment of human rights, socially valued goods, opportunities, and resources. This means more than laws on the books or parity in numbers; it means expanded freedoms and improved overall quality of life for all people.

- Gender Equity is a state of fairness between women and men. To ensure fairness, measures must often be available to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that may prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality.



Example: an engineering program at a university provides general scholarships for students to study engineering. Anyone can apply, and, in theory, an equal number of young men and women could be awarded those – this would be equality. In contrast, equity would mean offering additional scholarships specifically for young women who wish to pursue engineering to try and increase the number of female students in the program. Again, the idea is for equity to lead (eventually) to equality.

- Female Empowerment is the process of women and girls acquiring the power to act freely, exercise their rights, and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society. While empowerment often comes from within—and individuals can empower themselves—cultures, societies, and institutions create conditions that can facilitate or undermine the possibilities for empowerment.

AND THERE’S MORE!

Just as people are diverse, so are the concepts and terms used to describe them, the challenges they face, and some of the ways to address those challenges. Here are a few more important ideas.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)⁷ is any physical, mental, social, or economic abuse against a person because of that person’s gender. This includes: (a) violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to the person—including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty—whether occurring in public or private life; and (b) actual or threatened physical, mental, social, or economic abuse that occurs in a domestic relationship.

- GBV that takes place in and/or around a school is referred to as School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV).

- SRGBV is first and foremost a human-rights issue. However, SRGBV is also a critical factor in determining student attendance, retention, and learning outcomes. It can take the form of gender-based bullying and/ or physical violence (by other students or a teacher), corporal punishment, pressure by teachers on students for sex in exchange for good grades, etc.

Male/Men’s Engagement⁸ is a programmatic approach that involves men and boys (a) as clients and beneficiaries, (b) as partners, and (c) as agents of change, in actively promoting gender equality, women’s empowerment, and the transformation of inequitable definitions of masculinity. In the education context, and specifically in reference to STEM education, this can refer to partnering with men and boys in efforts to promote girls’ interest in and pursuit of STEM-related academic and career goals.

! One example would be having dialogues with male students in STEM-topic classes about gender stereotypes related to who can succeed in STEM and how they can contribute to the creation of a supportive environment that promotes girls’ self-confidence in their capacity in these topics.

Intersectionality can be defined as: “the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.” The concept can be used to consider how different identities and attributes might work together to reinforce negative assumptions about an individual and disadvantage him/her.

! **Example:** A female student from an ethnic minority group is in a STEM-topic class of mostly boys who belong to an ethnic majority group. We can analyze the situation by first looking to see which social categories might have an impact on classroom dynamics and therefore on the student’s potential interest and self-confidence in a given STEM topic. In this case, she is a girl in a classroom of almost all boys who may feel that, because she is a girl, she can’t be good at this topic, and



they may make disparaging comments when she tries to answer questions or participate. As an ethnic minority, she may also receive additional disrespect that further reduces her self-esteem. In this way, one can consider the (multiple) factors that may contribute to this student’s lack of interest in STEM and then try to address them accordingly. Using intersectionality as a lens through which to understand the diversity of students and their different challenges can be a powerful tool to help all individuals succeed.

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