Trainers need:
- Good group process skills and an awareness of group dynamics. It is the role of the trainer to make sure everyone participates and feels able to share insights and experiences.
- An understanding of nonviolent actions and campaigns. If no one has experience, the trainer needs to use case studies and exercises to help the group learn.
- To learn how and when to use the right exercises, being sensitive to the needs and styles of groups.

*Gender and nonviolence*

Cattis Laska

“As we have accumulated more and more evidence from more and more societies, we have become increasingly confident in this assertion that to omit gender from any explanation of how militarisation occurs, is not only to risk a flawed political analysis; it is to risk, too, a perpetually unsuccessful campaign to roll back that militarisation.”

Cynthia Enloe

Nonviolence is about putting an end to violence, no matter if this violence is committed on a large or small scale, on an intimate or a structural level. Nonviolence is about challenging hierarchical structures based on values of domination and control, and about confronting both injustice and the oppressive structures, institutions and authorities that uphold them.

For movements working for peace and justice, confronting oppression and injustice in society, it is very important to question and confront the power structures perpetuating the same injustices within our own movements. Groups where women, queer and/or trans* people — or anyone else — feel excluded, not listened to and not taken seriously, will drastically fail in accountability. Actively working to make our movements inclusive, broad and diverse does not just make for larger movements; it makes room for more perspectives and experiences, and also makes us more creative and effective in our work against injustice. In order to create safe and sustainable communities, and cultures that promote peace and justice, we must address all issues of structural, cultural and direct violence wherever they exist, and in whatever form they take.
Gender awareness helps us to make sure that we don’t perpetuate the same injustices in our nonviolent actions and campaigns that we are trying to stop.

In this section, we include concepts to help you incorporate gender awareness in your trainings, actions and campaigns.

What is gender and how does it affect us?

Gender is a social construction of ideas that assign certain roles, attitudes, images and behaviour to us depending on the sex we were assigned to at birth and the gender identity that we and society identify us with.

‘Male’ and ‘female’ are constructed as — and assumed to be — binary positions, which means opposites that are mutually interdependent and attracted to each other. Ideas about male and female behaviour, of masculinities and femininities, interact with and change depending on other social categories such as race, age, ability, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity and religious beliefs, and also vary over space and time, but affect and influence all of us our whole lives. The world around us expects us, and teaches us, to be either boys/men or girls/women, with different standards of behaviour for these two categories. Out of these expectations we learn how to act, feel and think in order to pass as either male or female.

Gender is not something we are, it is something we do. We are permanently (re)constructing gender, our own as well as others. Thus, rather than fixed and opposite positions, we should understand gender as something that exists within a constellation, as identities and expressions existing by themselves and in clusters, being constantly reformed and regrouped by us and the societies we live in. This means that there are many possibilities to change how we understand gender, and to open up space for all the varieties of gender that exist, space that is needed in a just and peaceful society.

The assumptions about us and expectations on us because of our (perceived) gender identity condition our choices and possibilities in all kinds of ways. The social constructions about gender contribute heavily to power relations between individuals, as well as between groups of people.

How is gender related to power and justice?

The social construction of gender teaches us to view the world and think in dichotomies, and to associate these with either masculinity or femininity; activity versus passivity, rationality versus emotion, strength versus weakness, control versus disorganisation. Patriarchy teaches us to value the categories associated with masculinity higher than those associated with femininity, and — using the same logic — the lives of those assigned the male gender higher than those assigned the female gender. Power and resources are also unequally distributed according to this logic. For example, this can be seen in how different kinds of work are valued and who is expected to do it, whose experiences and stories are listened to and believed, and who is given roles as leaders of family, community and society.

Consequently, the gender identity we are assigned to and that we ourselves
and society form us into, gives us very different amount of power over our lives and decisions that affect them. Our access to power and privileges also relies heavily on other social categories (such as race, class and age, among others), which means people get advantages or disadvantages from gender privilege in very different ways.

Adding to this, people who don’t comply with the expectations of their assigned gender are punished — privately, publicly, or both. People that behave in a different way than is expected of their assumed gender identity, as well as people who don’t agree with the gender identity that the state has assigned them to, are confronted with a whole range of direct, structural and cultural violence.

Why is a gender perspective important to our work?

Violence takes many and various forms; it can manifest as physical harm between one person and another, as psychological control by a partner over many years, as occupational injuries because of monotonous, wearing work, as chronic illnesses and shorter life expectancy because of housing in polluted
areas, or as large scale violence against whole populations in times of war. In all cases, violence is made possible by the existence of unequal power relations (out of which gender is one). Power relations rely on violence, among other sanctions, for their reproduction. With a gender lens, we can understand how violence and (gender) power relations are mutually constituted in all spheres of social life, and how the different forms of violence are gendered, This gives us an important insight into our work for peace and justice.

One example of this is the way we use technology. The idea of “being in control” (of one’s life, of the world) is closely related to certain masculinities, and contributes to the belief not only that technology can be controlled (such as nuclear power, or genetically modified organisms), but also that technology can solve almost all problems. At the same time, technology itself and the consequences of the use of technology have a very different impact on our lives, depending on our gender.

Creating peace is about building a society where all of us can feel safe and a sense of affinity, and so peace is intimately connected with struggling against power structures and norms that limit, marginalise and oppress us. Although patriarchy and other power structures set limits for all of us, it is important to recognise how these structures values some lives and bodies more than other and oppress us in different ways.

For movements working to end violence it is crucial to understand the full spectrum of violence in our societies; the different forms it takes and how it targets and affects us in different ways depending on our positions. Working with gender awareness to change both ourselves, and the (power) dynamics within our organisations is an important personal and organisational transformation that in itself acts to diminish structural violence in our societies.

Gender awareness in nonviolent campaigns

Struggling for a world without violence, nonviolence includes sharing power and responsibilities and giving everyone the possibility to be involved on an equal basis. The success of any movement depends on its ability to involve people in many different ways of struggle and to make everyone’s contribution equally valid and essential to the kind of society we wish to create.

Incorporating gender awareness in a campaign can mean many things. The following questions can be used by organisers to think about, as well as for a whole group to reflect on together.

Analysis of the campaign issue

■ When seen through a gender lens, how are people effected differently by your campaign issue?
■ What voices are listened to when gathering information about the issue?
■ In what ways is your campaign issue reinforced by, and reproducing, ideas about gender?
■ How are the different realities and needs of those most impacted by your campaign issue being addressed and included in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the campaign/action?
The campaign’s face to society
- What are the norms in your society/surroundings and how do they affect and reflect upon your work? For example, what images and words do you use in outreaching material?
- When representing the campaign/action in media or at public events — how do you make sure there is space for those most often ignored/silenced to speak?
- What examples and scenarios do you use in workshops, presentations and at public actions? How can you question these norms (instead of reinforcing them)?
- Which public do you aim to mobilize with the campaign/action? How do you ensure the participation of marginalized groups?

Internal processes / Organizational structure
- How do you ensure organizational structures that allow everyone’s voice to be heard equally? For example, does everyone have equal access to and influence in decision making processes? How do you communicate in between actions and meeting and make sure information reaches everyone concerned?
- How is access and use of resources — such as knowledge or finances — decided?
- When and where do you have meetings? How do you make sure meetings are accessible for everyone who wants to take part? For example, does it have toilets that are non-gendered and wheelchair accessible? Is the location itself as well as the route to get there safe and in a reachable distance?
- How inclusive is the language that is being used? How do you make sure that nobody makes assumptions of someone else’s gender identity?
- How do you divide tasks and roles? Are there gendered, or in other ways biased, assumptions about who ‘should’ take on particular roles or do particular tasks? How do you share responsibility for supportive roles such as note taking, cleaning, and logistical support?
Dealing with violence from outside the campaign/group

- How do you deal with conflicts and violence from outside the group?
- How do you prepare for encounters with representatives of the state like police or courts and the violence from them?
- How does your group take into account how people will have different experiences of the state or law enforcement (depending on gender, race, class, origin etc.)? How is people’s different needs for protection being received in the group?
- How do you make sure that there are ways for people in more vulnerable positions to still participate in the action?
- How are any specific consequences/repercussions as a result of the campaign/action being taken into account? For example, will anyone run a greater risk of being harassed?

This piece was written with the help of Denise Drake, Joanne Sheehan, Andrew Dey, Andreas Speck, Miles Tanhira, and Dorie Wilsnack.

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Violence

There are many ways to describe violence. A former Chair of War Resisters’ International, Narayan Desai, once said;

“Everything that disturbs the harmony in life is violence.”

Every school of nonviolence will have their own definition of violence; you don’t need to agree with Narayan. However, there is no doubt that violence is much more than physical violence against other humans.

Johan Galtung — direct, structural and cultural violence

Peace scholar Johan Galtung made an important contribution to the understanding of violence, by making a distinction between direct and structural violence. He defined direct violence as ‘physical harming other humans with intention’ and structural violence as ‘harm to humans as a result of injustices in our societies’. Later, Galtung added the term cultural violence to his concept. Cultural violence refers to culturally