

Values Clarification

Introduction

This exercise challenges people to articulate and examine their values and attitudes toward certain issues related to gender and sexuality. Often we are unaware of our own biases. Sometimes our beliefs have a rationale; other times, they are a product of our surroundings and may persist until we question them and begin to imagine an alternate reality. For example, if one grows up in a culture where violence against women is considered normal, one may never think to even question this practice.

Furthermore, this exercise exposes participants to people with differing opinions. This is helpful for our work because it demonstrates that people have a broad range of opinions and experiences that we may not always agree with.

Indeed, a central assumption of ISOFI is that self-reflection and personal change is a necessary component of organizational transformation. One cannot challenge harmful social norms such as gender and sexuality inequities, either in communities or within CARE, without also examining one's own beliefs. Almost all staff who participated in ISOFI activities reported that personal transformation helped them let go of old ideas, thereby influencing their behavior and having lasting effects. Consequently, personal transformation led to organizational changes, reflected in policies such as appointing gender and sexuality point persons.

Objective

- To enable participants to reflect on their personal attitudes and values around gender and sexuality.

Timeframe: 2-4 hours, depending on the number of statements you choose to discuss

Materials needed: signs that say 'agree,' 'disagree,' and 'don't know'

Ideal workspace: enough space for people to move about freely. If necessary, move tables and chairs out of the way.

Number of participants: 10-25; preferably similar numbers of men and women

Introductory Exercise 5

“It raised sensitive issues and opened up a space to think about new issues. I will continue to learn about these issues beyond the course.”

CARE staff member, Vietnam

“I think the best thing that happened is [ISOFI] helped in improving team work because the barriers diminished... it helped in building understanding, I would say, a team able to relate to each other.”

CARE staff member, India

“Having a group of mixed sexes is a factor, it helped us to know the opposite sex better. Our misconceptions about the other sex were cleared. The open interaction with other sex increased our confidence and self esteem.”

CARE staff member

“Our team relationship improved and became friendlier and more open. We gained confidence and built camaraderie around ourselves.”

CARE staff member, India

STEP 1

Designate two corners of the room as ‘Agree’ and ‘Disagree’ respectively, and a place in between as ‘Don’t know.’ Read out one of the following statements and ask participants to respond by moving closest to the sign that corresponds with their opinion. (The statements below are examples. You can choose a few or add more depending on how much time is available, or insert others that are more appropriate to your context.)

1. A man needs other women, even if things with his wife are fine.
2. I would never have a gay friend.
3. It is OK for a man to hit his wife if she won't have sex with him.
4. I would be outraged if my wife/husband wanted to use a condom.
5. Pregnant girls should be expelled from school.
6. There are times when a woman deserves to be beaten.
7. Women who carry condoms on them are “easy.”
8. Changing diapers, giving the kids a bath, and feeding the kids are the mothers' responsibility.
9. It is a woman's responsibility to avoid getting pregnant.
10. A man should have the final word about decisions in his home.

Move through the questions slowly, and facilitate a discussion about why people chose the response that they did after each question. Use questioning to dig deeper into the underlying issues. Allow some time for debate between people of differing viewpoints. After a short debate, ask people if they would like to change their position, or if anyone in one group wants to convince people in another group to change positions or move closer to their position.



M. Prvulović/CARE

1. A man needs other women, even if things with his wife are fine.

Very often we hear that men have a need to need to fulfill their sexual desire. Do you think that men need sex more than women? Women are often taught how to discipline their own and men's desire. How about men? Can men discipline their own desires?

Is it possible for men to control their sexual desire? What is the effect on a man's wife if he visits a sex worker? Is it ever culturally acceptable for a woman to go to a sex worker?

Is it culturally acceptable for a woman to accept money in exchange for sex? Is it culturally acceptable for a man to accept money in exchange for sex?

Participants who agreed with this statement mentioned:

It is his right to learn about sex and discharge his sperm, even if he is married or on business trips.

It is a personal choice.

Note for the facilitator: *You might want to ask, "What is the right of his wife in this case? Does she have any right to negotiate the risks that come along with her husband's choice?"*

Participants who disagreed with this statement mentioned:

*He does not need to go to a sex worker – he can have girlfriends. **Note to the facilitator:** You might want to ask, "What is the difference between a girlfriend and a sex worker? Why is one more acceptable than the other?"*

If you love someone you know the person, and therefore can prevent the spread of sexual diseases.

Morally it is not acceptable.

If there is demand, there will be supply – therefore there should not be demand.

Note to facilitator: *You might want to ask, "How can our programs deal with demand then?"*

This creates sexual abuse, and women suffer.

The commoditization of women as sex workers is patriarchal.

If he is married, he is violating his wife's rights.

"I am thinking now about how to formalize this into my work."

CARE staff member, Vietnam

"ISOFI doesn't tell you what to do. It just lets you grow and helps you to learn with your mistakes. It has helped us to actually take ownership. I think that this is what it has done for the entire ISOFI team."

CARE staff member, India

“I really appreciate the ability to discuss freely what we feel and raise questions that we have. I liked the fact people had the space to speak about how they feel without fear of judgment.”

CARE staff member, Vietnam

“When I participated in ISOFI activities, we normally talked and shared personal opinions. So I used this same process to discuss with the project partners and communities.”

CARE staff member, Vietnam

2. I would never have a gay friend.

Homosexuality is not an illness. Simply put, homosexuality is primary sexual attraction to or sexual activity among persons of the same sex. Homosexuality may make us feel uncomfortable because it's not something we see all the time. But the fact that it is uncommon does not mean that it is wrong. Homosexuals can have healthy, loving relationships just like anyone else. In fact, it is possible that you already have a friend who is gay, but you don't know it.

Why would someone not want to have a gay friend? What if you didn't know that the person was gay? Why are gay people feared?

If someone has a sexual fantasy about someone who is the same sex, does it make that person a homosexual? If someone shares a romantic kiss with someone of the same sex, does it make those people homosexual? If someone experiments with homosexuality when they are young, but ends up married to someone of the opposite sex, is that person a homosexual?

A note on religion and homosexuality:

“Liberal individuals and groups within Christianity, Islam and other religions have been quick to incorporate scientific findings within their ethical and religious beliefs. They generally regard homosexuality as a sexual orientation which is ethically neutral, fixed, unchosen, and is normal and natural for a minority of adults.

More conservative movements tend to stress revelation and tradition. Their beliefs are anchored to the past. Their beliefs are much less liable to change rapidly. They generally regard homosexuality as a deviate and disordered behavior, which is immoral, changeable, chosen, abnormal and unnatural. A person's beliefs about homosexuality tend to be determined less by their religion, than where their beliefs lie on the liberal-conservative divide.”

(source: http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_isla.htm)

“In the mid-1970s, the Catholic Church recognized the difference between being homosexual and engaging in homogenital (same-sex) acts. The Catholic Church holds that, as a state beyond a person's choice, being homosexual is not wrong or sinful in itself.

The Church also teaches understanding and compassion toward gay and lesbian people. In their 1976 statement, To Live in Christ Jesus, the American bishops wrote, ‘Some persons find themselves through no fault of their own to have a homosexual orientation. Homosexuals, like everyone else, should not suffer from prejudice against their basic human rights. They have a right to respect, friendship, and justice. They should have an active role in the Christian community.’ ”

(source: <http://www.dignityusa.org/faq.html#2>)

Some participants who agreed with this statement mentioned:

Sex should only be between men and women, therefore homosexuality is not a normal thing.

It is a kind of disease where a person has something wrong with their body.

Some participants who disagreed with this statement mentioned:

We know of perfectly normal, loving relationships that are homosexual.

In the Vietnamese context it is considered abnormal, but it is a person's right to make the choice.

Some people get sexual pleasure from same sex relationships.

It is normal to want to satisfy ourselves in different ways.

Some participants weren't sure:

Feels wrong... but is it?

I think people are homosexual because of a genetic abnormality, but I also believe it is socially normal.

3. It is OK for a man to hit his wife if she won't have sex with him.

Under what circumstances is it OK for a wife to refuse to have sex with her husband? Can she refuse sex if she knows he has an STI? Can she refuse sex if she is too tired? If he is drunk? If she fears she will become pregnant?

Having sex whenever her husband demands it is often considered a wife's 'duty.' Is it also a husband's duty to fulfill his wife's sexual desires? Is it culturally OK for a woman to express her sexual desire?

4. I would be outraged if my wife/husband wanted to use a condom.

Is it ever appropriate for a married couple to use condoms? How would your spouse react if you suggested using condoms? If he or she were unsure, how would you convince him or her to use condoms?

Often in the context of marriage, using condoms is associated with lack of trust. However, condoms are an effective form of family planning and they can add excitement to sexual activity.

“We are so involved in proving our competencies that we do not even want to honestly reflect. ...[B]ut after ISOFI, there has been a revelation – a personal journey within me.”

CARE staff member, India

“Empowerment within is important as we work towards empowerment of communities.”

CARE staff member, India

“It helps us to share experiences among ourselves; that way we can see gender, diversity and sexuality in our own organization.”

CARE staff member, Vietnam

“The socialization of ISOFI has been such that always we have been heard.

Expressing, sharing and opening up helped us to develop listening skills and helped us in understanding people.”

CARE staff member

5. Pregnant girls should be expelled from school

What might be the consequences on the girl's future if she is expelled from school? What might be the consequences for the girl's child?

Why do many schools decide to expel pregnant students? Does this punishment really deter other girls from becoming pregnant?

Why are the boys who impregnate girls not expelled from school or punished in any way? What if the girl is pregnant as a result of rape or incest, or sexual harassment by a teacher? Does she deserve to be punished?

6. There are times when a woman deserves to be beaten.

What would be a justifiable reason for a husband to beat his wife? What are the psychological effects on a woman who is beaten? What are the psychological effects on children who witness their mother being beaten?

Why do many women who are beaten remain in abusive relationships?

Sometimes, women themselves feel that a beating may be 'deserved.' However, household violence de-values and humiliates women, and can be very dangerous to their physical health. Women remain in such relationships because they feel they are not capable of surviving without a man in their life, or because they have been conditioned to believe that they are not worthy of a life that is free from verbal and physical abuse.

Children who witness such behavior often grow up to repeat the same cycle; boys learn that a husband is supposed to treat his wife with domination and abuse, and girls learn to be submissive and obedient.

7. Women who carry condoms on them are 'easy.'

What is the label given to men who carry condoms? Are men ever considered 'easy'? What would an equivalent label be for boys? Why are different words to describe men and women?

At what age should youth learn about condoms? Boys? Girls?

There is nothing inherently immoral about condoms. Condoms are simply a tool to help us take care of our bodies. If you listen closely to many people who say they oppose condoms, in fact they actually are opposed to premarital or promiscuous sex.

Often, men are expected to be sexual initiators, while women are expected to either accept or refuse their advances. Women are expected to be in control, while it is accepted that men have desires that they need to fulfill. Men are expected to be interested in sex and sexually active; however, if women show an interest in sex, they are thought to be promiscuous. Why does society expect such different things from men and women? Is it fair?

8. Changing diapers, giving the kids a bath, and feeding the kids are the mother's responsibility.

Are men physically able to bathe and feed children? If they are able, why don't they do it?

Work that women do revolves around the physical, emotional and social wellbeing of other people, especially their husbands/partners and children. Work that men do is related to their role as bread winners/providers for their families, which leads them to seek out paid work. Why does society expect such different things from men and women? Is it fair?

9. It is a woman's responsibility to avoid getting pregnant.

Why should a man be concerned about avoiding an unintended pregnancy? In your community, are there any social consequences for men who father children but don't take responsibility? If it takes two people to cause a pregnancy, why aren't both people responsible for preventing a pregnancy? Why do some men deny their role in reproduction?

What are different ways to avoid an unintended pregnancy? Which ways are controlled by women? Which are controlled by men?

Often it is expected that, for women, sexual activity is primarily for reproductive purposes. Women are not seen as sexual beings, they are 'baby factories.' Men, however, have sex in order to satisfy their sexual desire. Why does society expect such different things from men and women? Is it fair?

10. A man should have the final word about decisions in his home.

Why? Should a woman have any input about decisions in the home? What would happen if man and women were equal partners in marriage? Is marriage meant to be an equal partnership?

“Now we understand each other. ISOFI gave us an opportunity to open our hearts and share our feelings. We talked about things that we never mentioned in the past.”

CARE staff member, Vietnam

“It has been great because we have been given the space to think about these ideas within ourselves as individuals, and not just as a part of the program.”

CARE staff member, Vietnam

“We have learned that no one is wrong and we can talk about our feelings. But we don’t change overnight.”

man, India

“We have realized that on these issues unless we ignite people’s views, they will not get newer understanding. We realize that it is very important to know the views of others.”

CARE staff member

STEP 2: Discussion

Initiate a discussion with the group using some or all of these questions as a starting point; ask additional probing questions as appropriate. Encourage debate within the group, and be ready to spend some time discussing the issues that arise.

- How did it feel to confront values that you do not share?
- What did you learn from this experience?
- Did you change your opinion about any of the issues?

STEP 3: Closing

Thank participants for their honesty, and their willingness to open their minds to different ways of thinking. Emphasize that values clarification is an ongoing process. It is normal to re-evaluate our attitudes as we grow and mature, and as we gather new knowledge and experiences.

Ask participants how this values clarification exercise will contribute to their work. How will it contribute to their own personal growth?

Notes to the Facilitator

It is important to maintain a non-judgmental atmosphere during this exercise. These are complicated, emotional issues, and some participants may react strongly. It is important to challenge our own understandings of sexuality, but we also need to remember that everyone brings his or her own personal perspective to the table.

Changing mindsets takes time. But it is important to point out to people that changing their opinion is possible; it is healthy to examine one’s attitudes and adjust them if necessary.