

Men have gender, too! Intervention on the OSCE-Conference 2016 in Berlin.

Silke Baer and Harald Weilnböck, cultures interactive e.V.

Two questions need to be raised: First: Why is gender important for Prevention? – and second: What is gender anyway?

At Cultures Interactive we work directly with young people. There you realized early on: It is crucial to listen to the young people, what their feelings and real life experiences are. And if you listen closely, you realize: Many of these experiences are gender experiences – they are about gender identity.

Now, what is gender anyway?

Whenever we CVE people talk about gender and we have only begun doing this quite recently ... then we usually mean women. Because up to recently we had never gotten close enough to the field, to realize that girls and women are, and have always been, an essential part of violent extremism – way back in the Third Reich and in the early neo-Nazi movements. And that had surprised us. Because we tended to look at the violent men.

So, by gender most of us mean: women. But if you talk with young people you realize: Gender is not only women. – Men have gender, too! We just haven't noticed!

Now, what do I mean by gender? I simply mean, how people feel about being male or female – and what consequences that has for how they behave and think; and how their thoughts about being a “true man” or a “good woman” make them go into violent extremism – and also: What gender can do to help people come out of it again.

Gender in this more sophisticated sense is really key. Not only do men have gender, too. And not only do young people quite willingly talk about these issues. But even more: Talking about gender, on a personal level, is the best thing you can do, if you want to prevent violent extremism.

Just think of it: All kinds of extremism have one thing in common: They are both sexist and homophobic. In fact, there is hardly any violent extremist or hate crime offender, male or female, who, on a personal level, doesn't manifest highly conflictive gender issues, like hyper-masculinity, exclusionary womanliness, intensive fears and disgust of sexually different life styles.

Plus, these conflictive issues do not only coincide with extremism – they are a *key psychological driving forces* behind it, especially if it comes to violent acts.

This is why women and LGTB communities are *prime target groups* of virtually all forms of violent extremism (right-wing extremist, AQ/ ISIS related, Christian fundamentalist etc.). And this is why all violent extremist movements are based on ideologies of gender inequality.

So, if we want to do effective PVE, there is much reason to not only talk about women – but also, and even more so, talk about gender. As first-line practitioners we realized this early on. This is why we launched the *WomEx* project, Women and Gender in Extremism and Prevention. This was in 2011.

We actually had a second good reason for doing so: Not only is there hardly any violent extremist who does not also show sexism and homophobia. But our mainstream societies are quite sexist and homophobic too at times. And since preventing violent extremism always also means creating resilient societies, we might just begin by talking gender.