

The subject for discussion was 'Gender', deliberately set wide with the proviso to stay within the UK. Sue also requested that we didn't devote too much time discussing pay equality or issues related to sexual abuse and harassment, which usually underpins gender debates, but focus instead on less visited aspects.

So, what is gender and how to define it? John suggested that the biological category assigned at birth is the 'sex' of the person; 'gender' could be perceived more as an identity developed through social and cultural differences. Male, female and a range in between.

And while homosexuality and lesbianism have legal protection, transitioning has left many feeling uneasy and confused. The focus is largely on men transitioning to women because of the obvious physical differences and the often present and underlying threat men pose towards women. The dynamics of an all-female group may change if a transitioned woman joins; curators of gender specific areas (public places, prisons, hospitals, colleges, schools) may have to rethink the facilities.

The discussion veered back into employment opportunities and the slow acceptance of gender equality – some areas being more progressive than others, (public vs private), and how the male-oriented physical jobs are in decline while the service sector lends itself more to gender equality.

There was a general feeling that possibly too much media time, too much hype was being given to an issue which relates to such a small percentage of the population, but it does expose wider questions of societal, educational and employment bias as well as ways to approach these issues in the future.

However, it was noted that the backlash, the 'Andrew Tate' response should be considered – that in the widespread protest surrounding women's demands for equality, respect and safety, many boys and men were left feeling disenfranchised, frustrated and angry.

Gender differences are so deeply embedded in our cultural upbringing – expectations in behaviour, underscored by education, religion, employment opportunities, leisure, sport and fashion, that a liberal acceptance from the general population is probably unachievable for the foreseeable future. The pendulum swings, a thesis develops, an antithesis emerges.