

Beyond the Binary

This activity is about gender binary stereotypes. Revisit binary as the concept of “two opposites” and add that gender is often unnecessarily divided into a binary of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ characteristics. Explain that gender is actually a more complicated interaction of multiple aspects of a person’s identity and there are significantly more than two ways a person might identify in regards to gender. Display the following infographic (available below and in a separate document) about gender and discuss how gender is the interaction of gender identity, gender expression, and biological sex. Briefly discuss the distinction of sexual orientation, which is included in the graphic in order to distinguish it from gender.

Oversimplified version of gender:

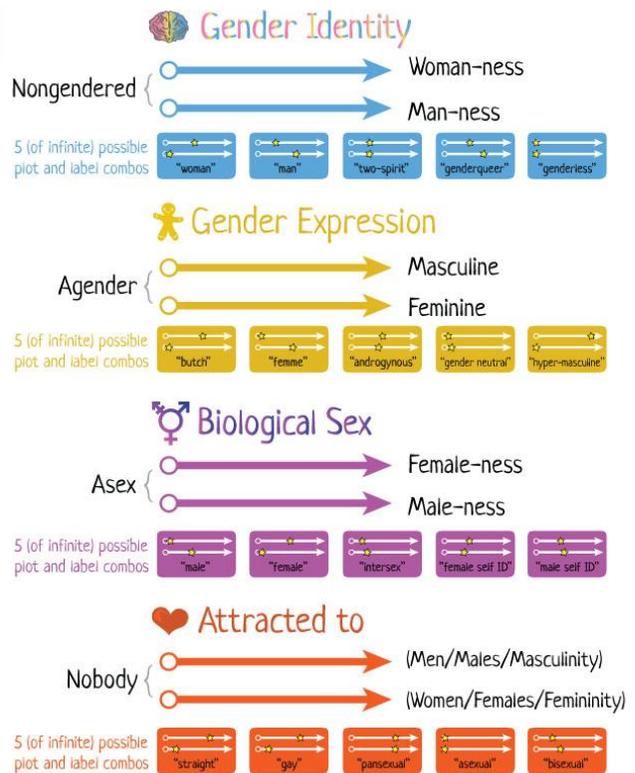
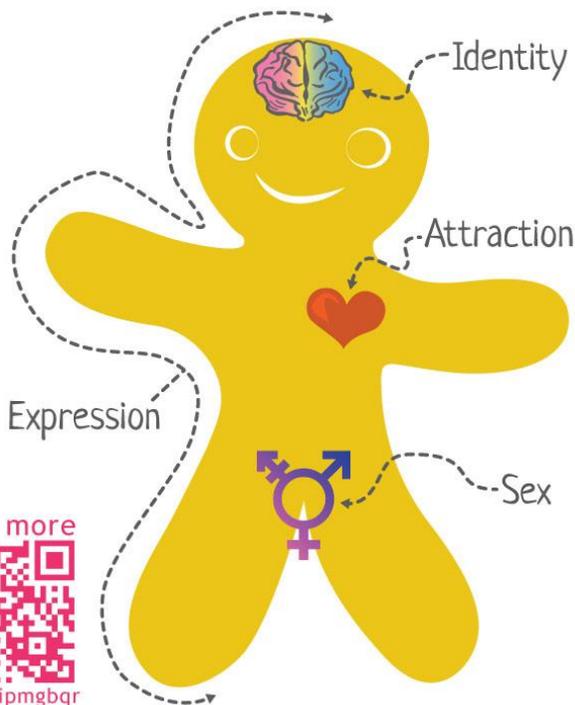


More comprehensive version of gender:

(Source: itspronouncedmetrosexual.com, August 2013)

The Genderbread Person v2.0 by its pronounced METROsexual.com

Gender is one of those things everyone thinks they understand, but most people don't. Like *Inception*. Gender isn't binary. It's not either/or. In many cases it's both/and. A bit of this, a dash of that. This tasty little guide is meant to be an appetizer for understanding. It's okay if you're hungry for more.



Terminology (for Facilitator reference):

Gender Expression

Safe Zone definition: Refers to all of a person’s external characteristics and behaviors – such as dress, grooming, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions – socially identified with a particular gender.

Gender Identity

Safe Zone definition: Refers to a person’s innate, deeply felt psychological sense of gender, which may or may not correspond to the person’s assigned sex at birth.

Biological Sex

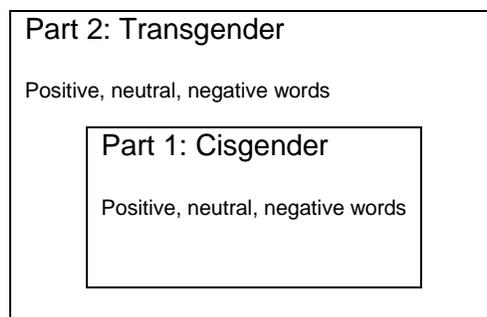
Safe Zone definition: The classification of people as male, female, or intersex. Determined at birth by the doctor’s interpretation of our chromosomes hormones, and our internal and external genitalia. Most commonly people are female assigned or male assigned at birth (FAAB/MAAB).

Sexual Orientation

Safe Zone definition: An enduring physical, romantic, emotional, and/or relational attraction to another person; may be a same-gender orientation, different-gender orientation, or bisexual orientation.

Next, introduce the terms transgender and cisgender. See if any participants can identify the terms, and then clarify/explain that transgender is a term to describe when a person’s preferred gender is different than their sex at birth and cisgender is a term to describe when a person’s preferred gender matches their sex at birth. Sex is about physical characteristics while gender is about an internal identity, even though it is often expressed outwardly. You may choose to reference some of the identity examples on the Genderbread Person (infographic) to illustrate what a cisgender or transgender identity might “look” like.

Divide the group into groups of 3 to 5 making sure not to separate people by their preferred gender. Give each group a piece of paper or whiteboard space and have them draw a box leaving space to write both inside and outside of the box. First, have the group brainstorm positive, neutral, and negative words associated with cisgender people, or feminine women and masculine men (e.g. rugged, motherly, cisgender, normal, etc.). Next, have the group brainstorm positive, neutral, and negative words associated with people who don’t conform to traditional femininity and masculinity, which might include people who are cross-dressers, androgynous, transgender, or transsexual (e.g. confused, gay, eccentric, abnormal, etc.).



Once each group has brainstormed their words, have them share their work.

Facilitator Questions

(Facilitator: feel free to ask more questions and have participants expand on their responses to develop a conversation that has perhaps more flow than just asking the questions in order)

1. How was this activity? Did you find it difficult?
2. Were there any trends regarding where the most positive, neutral, or negative terms were?
3. Why do you suppose we used the “box” to illustrate the different perceptions of cisgender people compared to transgender people?
4. How has the concept of cisgenderism changed over time; that is, what are some examples of how society’s views of masculinity and femininity have changed over time?
5. How might an individual person’s gender identity evolve and change over time?

6. What are some things we can do to challenge the gender binary?
7. How is being aware of our own concepts of gender identity, and the possible privileges we experience, an important part of being an ally?

Facilitator Observations

- As a reminder, sex and gender are not the same thing. Because sex is about physical characteristics and gender is about an internal identity and outward expression, sex is much more limited and gender is much more fluid, unique, and broad.
- Other cultures have different ideas of gender. Many Native American tribes had/have people considered to belong to a third gender role that features combinations of traditionally Native masculine and feminine traits. The term berdache (ber-dahsh) was used to describe Native men who lived more as Native women and shared in relationships with non-berdache men. In the 1990's the term "two-spirit" was introduced as an alternative to berdache and continues to be a presence in Native and non-Native culture. Source: University of Nebraska at Lincoln Encyclopedia of the Great Plains, August 2013.
- Based on this activity, there is a clear visual with the box. It is socially acceptable, and therefore more socially and physically safe, to be cisgender and be "in the box." It is less socially acceptable, and therefore less socially and physically safe, to be transgender and be "outside of the box." Transgender individuals experience higher levels of discrimination, harassment, and violence than the general population and are more likely than the general population to suffer mental distress. Source: UK National Health Service, August 2013.