

## BEYOND THE BINARY: EXAMINE GENDER “NORMS”

*Provide one handout to each person and explain that the two sides of the person represent our traditional gender binary of maleness and femaleness. Explain that binary in this sense suggests that men and women should have coordinating genders based on their sexes: either masculine or feminine with no flexibility. Clarify that sex is a person’s physical self (male, female, intersex) and gender is how a person thinks, feels, and acts, so sex is externally determined and gender is internally determined, but still visible through appearance and mannerisms. Ask participants to write any stereotypes, positive or negative, held about masculinity (e.g. what it means to be male) and femininity (e.g. what it means to be female). Give participants a few minutes to write down ideas. Once most participants have at least a few things written down, go around the room and ask participants to share at least one stereotype for each side. If someone is uncomfortable sharing or doesn’t have something new to add, simply move on.*

### FACILITATOR QUESTIONS

1. Are there any themes to the stereotypes? Are they about appearance? Skills? Hobbies?
2. From where do we learn these stereotypes and why do they persist?
3. Why do we categorize how society expects people to act, think, work, and look based on their perceived sex?
4. How do these stereotypes shape how we understand ourselves?
5. What are some examples of how society tends to buy into the gender binary? (examples: bathrooms, clothing advertisements that depict men/women in gender-specific clothing, “masculine” colors vs. “feminine” colors, job and school applications that ask for sex/gender, etc.)
6. What are some ways that our society has evolved to be more accepting of non-binary gender roles? (examples: working mothers, men wearing traditionally “feminine” colors, women wearing traditionally “masculine” clothing, men in nurturing roles like teachers and stay-at-home dads, etc.)
7. Who are some current figures or celebrities that don’t fit traditional male and female roles? (examples: Hillary Clinton as a power female politician, Will Arnett as a stay-at-home dad in both 30 Rock and Up All Night, Ellen DeGeneres as a CoverGirl and “masculine” dresser, Johnny Depp for notoriously wearing make-up and having long hair, etc.)
8. How do you think it might feel to identify outside of this binary?

### FACILITATOR OBSERVATIONS

- It is important to remember that stereotypes hurt everyone and not just the people they are about. Nobody wants their identity to be restricted by others, and gender variant and transgender people in particular can be seen as faking or exaggerating their identities because they don’t fit gender stereotypes.

- Just like sexual orientation is on a spectrum that includes more than just being straight or gay, a person's gender expression is on a spectrum that includes more than just masculine males and feminine females. Some of these identities – like being a tomboy – are currently more socially acceptable than others. It is important to dispel the notion that any gender expression is any more “natural” or correct than any other.
- Gender expression changes over time, place, and culture. For example, a century ago in the United States, pink was widely viewed as too “bold” of a color for females to wear. Does anyone have examples of other changes or differences between cultures?

Male

Female

