

Crossing the Gender Line

👤 Large Group 💡 101 🔒 Medium Trust ⌚ 15 mins 📁 Gender

An activity to examine gender based privilege, cultural bias and feelings of transphobia.

⚙️ Necessary supplies

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🚩 Goals & objectives

- To acknowledge and investigate cisgender privilege
- To gauge the climate of transphobic perspectives present in the group
- Highlight the various ways transphobia can be expressed
- Allow the group to get to know one another, their gender make-up, and have a better sense of where everyone is coming from

☰ Step-by-step walk through

1. Have the group form a line (ideally one line, if the room is wide enough -- if not, have them stand in a large circle).
2. Read explanation of activity to group.
3. Begin reading the items in the list, pausing between each item and stating “Notice who is with you, notice who is not, please cross back.”
4. Discuss activity as a whole with the group.

Introduction example: I am going to read to you a list of statements. If you identify with a statement I read, please take a large step forward to signify this. We will pause a moment, I will ask you to recognize your status, and then you will step back to reform a line. This activity is “challenge by choice,” meaning that we encourage you to step outside your comfort zone, but if any part of the activity makes you too uncomfortable you may abstain from participation. I ask that you all remain completely silent for the duration of this activity.

- I identify as a man
(Say “Notice who is with you, notice who is not, please step back.” -- continue this between each statement)
- I identify as a woman
- I identify as transgender



- I identify as genderqueer
- I identify as genderfluid
- I identify with a gender that was not mentioned (ask if they'd like to share)
- I have a friend who I know is transgender
- My gender dictates the type of clothes I wear and how I behave around others
- My gender has no influence on how I dress and act
- I believe men are inherently better at math and hard sciences
- I believe women are inherently more empathetic and sensitive
- I believe transgender people are confused
- Regarding gender, I believe our society gives everyone an equal shot at success and happiness
- I have been around others who made a transphobic comment and said nothing
- The idea of an intersex person (sometimes incorrectly called a "hermaphrodite") makes me uncomfortable
- I would prefer to know if someone was transgender before dating them
- I would not be comfortable being in a romantic relationship with someone who is transgender
- My parents would not be comfortable with me dating someone who was transgender
- I believe that the world is an accepting place for people who are transgender
- My gender would never impact the type of occupation I thought I could pursue
- I would never be afraid of being fired from a job, or not hired in the first place, as a result of my employer learning what my gender was
- My gender does not make me afraid of experiencing physical violence
- I would be afraid to tell my family if I was transgender
- I would be afraid to tell my friends if I was transgender
- Every day, I am aware of my gender and how it shapes my life



Discussion: lead a discussion that asks participants to reflect on their feelings during the exercise, focusing on discomforts or surprises, and any new insights they may have gleaned as a result of participating. The goal is help make folks aware of the privilege that comes with possessing certain identities.

Guiding questions

What is your reaction to this activity?

What do you think is the purpose of this activity?

- To allow people to get a sense of who is in the group.
- To make people aware of some issues that face the transgender community.

At what points in the activity were you uncomfortable?

- Follow up with people who respond and ask “Why do you think that is?”
- If nobody responds, highlight a few particular items that are striking to you (e.g., “I noticed people were looking around a lot during the ‘I believe transgender people are confused.’ Why was that?”)

At what points in the activity were you surprised?

- By what you did step forward for?
- And what you didn’t?
- Tidbit: the point of the “I would never be afraid of being fired from my job because of my gender” is to highlight the unfortunate fact that in most US states employers can fire transgender people for no reason other than their gender identity. So as to make it easier to navigate the separate notes.

Which questions or question groups resulted in you being unsure of whether or not you should step forward?

- The wording may have been unclear. Or they may not have been familiar with a particular term used (e.g, “intersex” or “transphobia.”)

What question groups resulted in situations where there was never an option for you?

- How did that make you feel?

What lessons can you take away from this activity that will affect your daily life from here on?

- I can’t assume other people have the same gender experience I have.
- There are a lot of elements of gender and privilege I didn’t know about.
- I didn’t realize how many opportunities are excluded from transgender people.



Notes

This activity can be quite heavy depending on the group and particularly for groups with members who come from transphobic families or hold transphobic views themselves. It's important to emphasize that the safe space, and ensure those participants aren't targeted in the discussion.

