

Genderbread Person

 Guided Discussion  101  Low Trust  15 mins  LGBTQ

Using the Genderbread Person as a guide, the activity leads participants to understand the important difference between gender, sex, and sexual orientation.

Necessary supplies

- Whiteboard/easel
- Blank Genderbread Person v1 handout
- Genderbread Person V3 (with write-up) handout
- Writing utensils

Goals & objectives

- To distinguish between sexual and gender identities
- Help individuals better understand the concepts of gender identity, expression, and sex

Step-by-step walk through

1. Introduce activity (see example below).
2. Address the difference between the L,G,B, and T.
3. Map out gender identity, expression, and sex using continua and proper labels.
4. Explain how each aspect of gender is independent of one another, and sexuality.

Example introduction: We commonly lump a lot of letters together when we talk about the queer community: LGBT is the most common, but it's often extended out to things like LGBTQA, made to spell things like QUILTBAG, and so on. There are always pros and cons to everything, but there are also some specific issues that come up when we equate "gay rights" with "LGBT rights," as is often done in the news.

Guiding questions

What are some of the issues you think might arise from the LGBT grouping?

- Makes people think Ls are the same as Gs and Bs and Ts
- Marginalizes identities that are left out (even on the super comprehensive acronyms, it only makes it more painful to the specifics who aren't included)

- What we're focused on in this activity: some of the letters represent sexual identities, while others represent gender identities.

What's the difference between the LGB and the T?

- The first three are sexualities, and the last one refers to gender.
- Some laws/privileges may apply specifically to one group and not the other
- People can be L and T, or B and T, etc. And T people can be LGBPA or identify as straight.

At this point, move to the Whiteboard (if you don't have a Whiteboard/Easel, just use the Genderbread Person v1 handout now and do your best to use the following questions/discussion points as you walk people through it). Draw three continua with dash marks in the middle like on the handout and label the first one Gender Identity. Have the group follow you whenever you write something.

We understand Gender Identity to be how you, in your head, define your gender, based on how much you do or don't align with what you understand to be the options for gender. What do you think the labels should be for this continuum?

- Woman on one side, Genderqueer in the middle, Man on the other side.
- Emphasize the importance of these particular labels, and give basic definitions for each one as you write them down.

Add the label Gender Expression to the next continuum.

Gender expression is the ways you present gender through your actions, dress, and demeanor, and how those presentations are interpreted based on gender norms. What do you think the labels should be for this continuum?

- Feminine on one side, Androgynous in the Middle, Masculine on the other side
- Again, emphasize the importance of these particular labels and define them

Gender expression is the ways you present gender through your actions, dress, and demeanor, and how those presentations are interpreted based on gender norms. What do you think the labels should be for this continuum?

- Feminine on one side, Androgynous in the Middle, Masculine on the other side
- Again, emphasize the importance of these particular labels and define them
- Add the label Biological Sex to the next continuum



Biological sex is based on the physical sex characteristics you're born with and develop, including genitalia, body shape, voice pitch, body hair, and chromosomes (to name a few). What do you think the labels should be for this continuum?

- Female on one side, Intersex in the middle, Male on the other side
- Emphasize the importance of these particular labels, explain that “hermaphrodite” is an offensive term and biological impossibility (as it means 100% male and female), and give basic definitions for each one as you write them down

Plot sample points on the first two continua at random and ask the group to guess where the third point would go. This is a trick question, and leads into the next discussion question.

Why is it problematic to try to guess what someone's biological sex might be based on their identity and expression?

- Because it's based on an assumption; assumptions are usually flawed
- The three things aren't dictated by one another
- Even if someone is super far on the left on two things, you still can't assume where they will land on the third

What are some examples of celebrities you can think of that zig-zag down the scales?

- David Bowie: man, androgynous/feminine, male
- Ellen: woman, androgynous/masculine, female
- Eddie Izzard: “complete boy plus half a girl,” feminine (on stage; masc off, usually), male

Add a fourth continuum, label it Sexuality, and ask for labels for it (straight, bi-, gay). Explain that like the three gender continua, sexuality is independent and not affected by the ones before it. That is, it's flawed to assume a person's sexuality based on their gender identity, expression, and biological sex.

What are some examples of the identity labels and people that come out of these continua, and how would we show them?

- Drag Queens (man, feminine, male, ???)
- Drag Kings (woman, masculine, female, ???) -- note: these are generally performance identities, a display of hyper-masculin-or-femininity
- Metrosexual (male, feminine(ish) (less so than a drag queen obviously), man, straight)
- Porche Del Rossi (female, woman, feminine, gay)
- Jason Collins (male, man, masculine, gay)



At this point, draw a genderbread person shape beside the continua, and draw arrows from each continuum to the respective part of the person (identity -> head; expression -> encompasses full body; bio sex -> genitals; sexuality ->heart). Explain that this is an extremely simplified and, in many ways, misleading way of explaining gender, but it's a great starting point. Refer them to the Genderbread Person v3 Handout for more reading and learning on their own time.

What are some implications of all this stuff we've talked about?

- Assumptions are a bad way to think you know someone.
- There are a lot of labels for different configurations on these scales, which are empowering to some individuals and offensive/stigmatizing for others.
- Gender is more complex than what you previously thought.

Make it your own

Change up the people or the identity terms you used to describe people as you plot them as examples along the scale.

Notes

Please read though this carefully and practice the activity before facilitating it for the first time. There are many steps involved and you must be clear on the steps or your participants will be LOST.

Gain understanding of all the terms and identity labels prior to conducting the activity. Many of the identity labels and terms are clarified in our Vocabulary activity. Refer to Genderbread Person v3 for additional learning.