



Fun Triangle Guide

Time Frame: Minimum of 25 minutes

Supplies Needed: 1 piece of flip chart paper or a dry erase board
Masking tape
2-3 different colored markers

Room Set Up: I prefer a seated circle of chairs for participants. Make sure everyone has a good view of the triangle figure. If facilitator is right or left handed will depend on where the “blind spot” will be. Make sure participants are close enough to be able to read the triangle and everything written on the page.

Facilitator Notes: *For some participants, I find that this is the first time sex and gender is not used as synonyms. I also find that this is the first time the connection between sex, gender, and sexual identity are grasped. A key phrase I used once to keep in mind of the difference is as follows: Sex is what is in your pants; Sexual Identity is what you do with your pants off; and Gender is the color or fabric of the pants themselves. While running the workshop, facilitators can also observe who the participants are that may need to talk more during the processing, be most uncomfortable with content, as well as finding any self-identified LGBT folks in the room that may move into “teacher” mode themselves instead of learning mode. Throughout the script are [facilitator notes in brackets like this.]*

The Script: Hi everyone, I'm [insert names]. This activity is going to really map out what I am talking about when I say Sex, Gender, and Sexual Identity.

[Draw the upside down triangle on board or paper. I usually make a joke about even my activities being “queer” as the upside down triangle is a symbol of the LGBT community.]

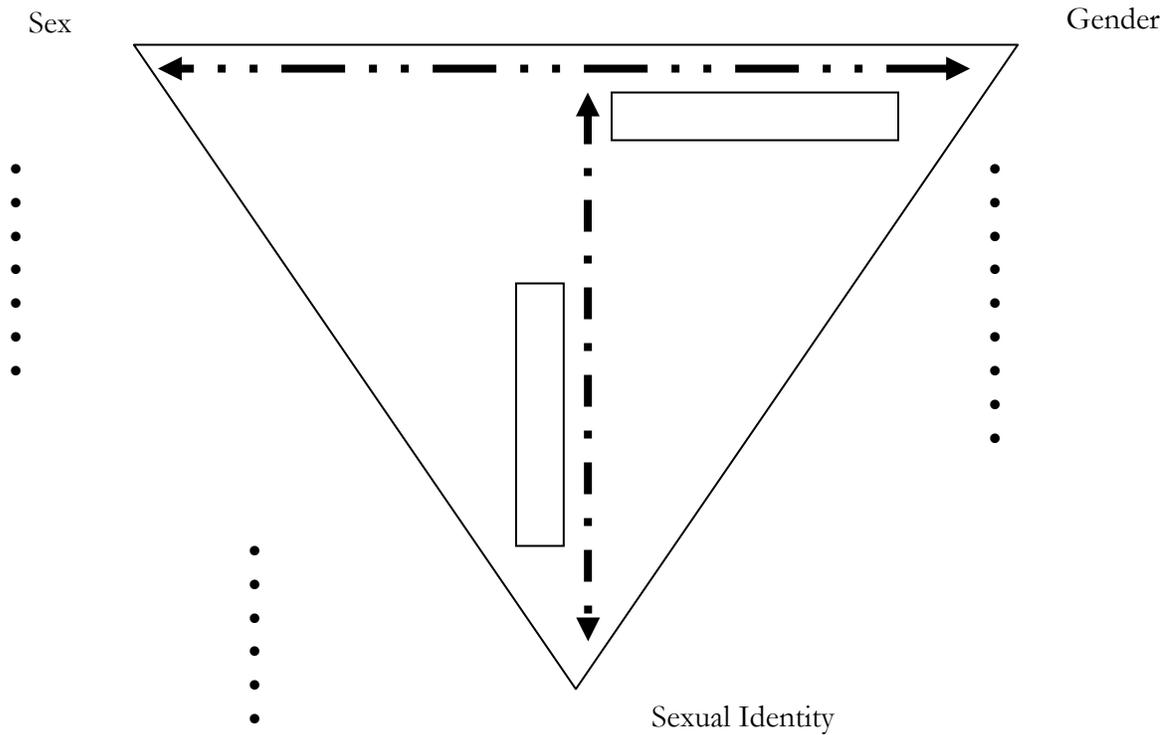
How many of you have used Sex and Gender as synonyms? Think about surveys or asking demographic data of folks. We usually do, but they are actually very different. For the sake of this activity – Let's separate the two out. *[Write Sex at the top left and Gender at the top right points of the triangle.]* Then we have Sexual Identity *[Write Sexual Identity at the bottom point of the triangle.]* I use the term Sexual Identity instead of Sexual Orientation as it seems to me to be a more inclusive way to describe who someone is romantically or sexually attracted to. *[Here is the worksheet I use as a handout for folks to write on. I will complete it for you below.]*

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Frequently the words or concepts of Sex and Gender are seen as synonyms. For the sake of this training, think of Sex and Gender as two different concepts.

When you think of *Sex*, what comes to mind? (*Biology, Science, Physical Elements, Characteristics*)

When you think of *Gender*, what comes to mind? (*Roles, Identities, Perceptions, Expressions*)

When you think of *Sexual Identity* (often referred to as Sexual Orientation), what comes to mind?

What “isms” maintain this structure?



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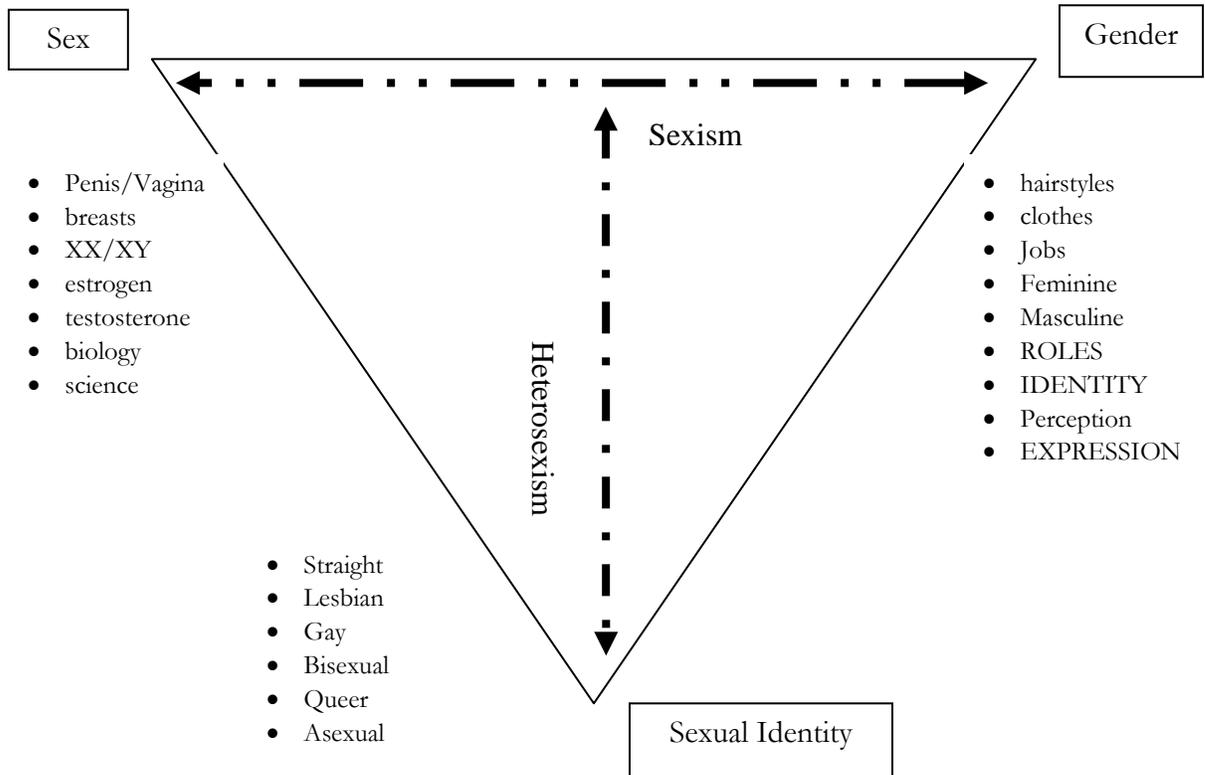
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Developed by Owen Marciano and Jessica Pettitt



[The Triangle should only have the three labels, Sex, Gender, and Sexual Identity on it when you begin the discussion.]

Starting with Sex: What comes to mind? Remember Sex and Gender is separated for the sake of this exercise. *[Write down similar things to above and helped participants come up with these words. It is imperative you use Penis and Vagina as these words may make people uncomfortable and you need to paint a tone that this is ok. Also, someone will try and shock others by saying these words so get it over with before that happens.]* *[This may also be a good time, depending on facilitators comfort level and the participants control level, to introduce the topic of intersex. I tell a story about my best friend in 9th grade, Linda that had 12 toes. We all know of “weird” things that happen genetically, but we don’t leave any room for this when it comes to sex characteristics. We typically*

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understand biology of genitalia, chromosomes, and hormones to be binary and either “blue” or “pink.” Someone with an Intersex Condition (preferred term to Hermaphrodite) may have an internal or external combination of these characteristics.]

So if that is Sex, what is Gender? [Participants will callout different things write down a few and then write Roles, Identity, Perception, and Expression or (RIPE to remember it).] Of the words we came up with what is a role? [*jobs, hobbies, etc.*] What has more to do with Expression? [*feminine, masculine, clothes, mannerisms, etc.*] What would I mean by Identity? [*femme, butch, dyke, fairy, fag, man, women, etc.*] Roles, Identity, and Expression are elements of Gender that you control. However, Perception is how others see you. You can try to express yourself in a way that may align with how you identify and that correlate with your roles, but it is really up to other people how they perceive you. A person can also purposefully express themselves, take on roles, and identify, in ways that don't perfectly align as “pink” or “blue” as this system is constructed and changes over time by culture and by the individual. It is also important to note where we can't control how other's perceive us, we can and only we can control how we perceive others. We make the assumption that everything related to gender is clearly “pink” or “blue,” but some folks don't feel this is true for them. People could identify as a man and have long hair or be a nurse or a woman could be a professional wrestler and drive a truck. Some people may have been labeled one way at birth and identify as an entirely different gender (transgender) and some may seek medical treatment, hormone supplements, and surgeries to better express their gender (transsexual). Others may not like the “pink” and “blue” gender binaries and just want to be themselves without labels (gender variant). [*Transgender and Transsexual are preferred terms to Transvestite and can be represented by the term Trans.*]

Lastly, what are different Sexual Identities? [*Gay, Lesbian, Straight/Heterosexual, Bisexual, Queer, etc.*] [*Make sure you add Asexual or that one participant that is the thorn in your side will say it to be sarcastic.*] [*Homosexual is a pejorative term so don't list it; if it is called out break it down to lesbian, gay, bisexual.*] Transgender or Transsexual sometimes gets called out here, but that isn't a sexual identity. A Trans person has a sexual identity before and after transition, but being trans itself isn't a sexual identity.

How are we doing here? We are talking about some pretty big topics, so it is ok to have questions, need clarifications, be confused, or just need to sit with this information a little while. [*Take questions, clarifications, etc. Observe participants body language for comfort level before moving on. For some groups the discussion may really pretty much*

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need to stop here. Moving on to institutionalized forms of oppression is up next. If you don't think you can do it or if the participants just aren't up for it – then stop. If you have time left over, start conversations about how the three points are interconnected. Directions for this conversation are following the Sexism and Heterosexim discussion.]

There are two oppressive forces at play here keeping this “pink” and “blue” system in check and ordered according to our social constructed cultural norms.

What oppressive force do you think would exist connecting Sex to Gender? I will give you a hint, it ends in ...ism. Right Sexism! *[Even if participants don't call anything out I say Good Job! or something affirming to get energy back up or to keep it up as we head into a deeper level conversation.] [Write is Sexism along a horizontal dotted line between Sexism and Gender.]*

Sexism – in a Sexist Society who has the power? In our culture the answer would be men. I think of power like poker chips. Someone steps out of a poker game freeing a seat for you and you inherit their poker chips. Men inherit male privilege and therefore have more power over those that are not men. Of those that are not men, who has the most power? Women! This is important to clarify because folks that don't identify or express themselves or are not perceived by others as a man or a woman have less privilege or power than folks perceived as women and way less than those folks perceived as men. Sexism is what ultimately determines what constitutes “pink” and “blue.”

Now, if Sexism is at play here *[pointing to the line between Sex and Gender]*, what would be here? *[Draw a vertical dotted line between Sexual Identity and the middle of the line between Sex and Gender.]* Another hint... it ends in ism.

Heterosexism *[write in along the dotted line]* is the oppressive force that connects what we think are synonyms, but clearly aren't to sexual identity. We assume everyone is “pink” or “blue” and then we assume that everyone's internal and external characteristics are also “pink” or “blue” but our culture takes it one step further and we assume that all “pinks” are attracted to “blues” and vice versa. In fact, we use the term “Coming Out” when someone has to announce that they in fact are not heterosexual. *[Use this space to talk about how straight people don't have to disappoint other's expectations by coming out as straight – this assumption of normative behavior or identity is privilege – more inherited poker chips that a person who identifies as non-heterosexual gives back by*

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coming out or taken away if a person perceived to be non-heterosexual regardless of the individual's actual identity.]

So to review, we have a person – [*point to sex and the listed words there*] we probably don't know what is inside of their pants, but [*point to gender and the list of words there*] based on how we perceive this person, we will make assumptions and draw conclusions about a person Sex and Gender and ante up the culturally allotted amount of poker chips, or privilege. So this would be like guessing what is in the pants based on the color or fabric of the pants, maybe how the person walks in the pants, where they were purchased, style, etc. Once we have made the assumption here [*tracing the sexism line*] we will assume heterosexuality unless otherwise informed by this person. Now if our gender perception of this person doesn't line up perfectly “pink” or “blue” we will automatically assume non-heterosexuality. If we read this person as male, but feminine, we assume he is gay unless told otherwise; female, but masculine, we assume she is a lesbian unless told otherwise. The burden is on the person we perceive. So we assume what is in the pants based on how we perceive the person in the pants and then assume what that person does with their pants off...

This may sound confusing but we do it everyday all day to every person. Imagine how hard it must be if these assumptions about you are incorrect and you have the burden of correctly others and risking violence, rejection, etc. Understanding how this would feel is the first step to being an Ally for the LGBT Community.

Lastly, it is important to understand how these points, Sex, Gender, and Sexual Identity are connected. Let's all picture a person in heads. Everyone got a picture? Now, this person is walking towards you on an empty sidewalk. There are some people that may make us move to a side of the sidewalk, off onto the grass, change sides of the street, or hold our place firmly on the sidewalk – consciously or unconsciously.

If we take power and privilege as inherited poker chips into consideration – lets take it one step further in that when we perceive other's we give them a certain amount of poker chips based on our assumptions and then take them away based on what we find out or as our assumptions and judgments change.

Back to the person walking towards you on the sidewalk, based on their physical size [*point to Sex*] you assume that the person is a man [*point to Gender*]. If you identify as a man, this may not concern you at all, if you are a woman, this may be taken into

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consideration when determining what you will do to pass this person. Does this “man” look scary? Do you feel endangered?

As the “man” gets closer you determine that “he” is wearing a skirt so you decide that this “man” is actually a tall woman or a gay [*point to Sexual Orientation*] man [*point to Gender*]. This change is significant to understand because in our culture, someone tall is supposed to be a man and someone in a skirt is supposed to be a woman. If this person is a woman – we assume they are straight. If this person is a man in a skirt we assume they are gay – automatically. Take some time picturing people or even yourself in one of these points and see how the other two automatically get applied through assumptions and judgments. Now see how Roles, Expression, and Identity work to connect Sex, Gender, and Sexual Identity.

[This may be difficult for participants or even facilitators. I recommend facilitators getting comfortable with at least 3 examples of people that could be on this sidewalk that vary on expression, roles, identity, and sexual identity. Regardless of the example, the Sex is almost always assumed to align with the Gender perception.]

Does breaking Sex and Gender being separate make sense now? Does it also make sense how they are conflated together into synonyms? Once you have a better understanding of how they are different it is much easier to assess the tools used to gather information. For example, when looking at retention rates at your institution, are you really asking what the connection between testosterone or testicles is to graduation rates? My guess is, you are asking about students living as men on campus and the connections to the roles these men play and graduation rates.

This is really only the starting point of this discussion. Without this foundation, the discussion falls flat and is based on erroneous information.

Hopefully this helps continue conversations based on the real complex lives of people. It really is this simple.

Thank you!

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