



Gender This!

Time Frame: Minimum of 45 minutes

Supplies Needed: Flip chart paper or board
Multiple colors of markers
Masking Tape

Room Set Up: Draw two stick figures large on a board or one each on a large sheet of flip chart paper. Facilitator should have multiple colors of markers. Participants need a clear view of the flip chart paper.

Facilitator Notes: *This is a VERY basic level program that gets people talking and the energy level can get high. Remember that you are trying to draw the binary gender system. Keep things very binary with your comments, drawings, and questions or suggestions. Throughout the script are [facilitator notes in brackets like this.]*

The Script: Hello! My name is [insert name] and today we are talking about gender. The best way I know how to do this is to first get everyone involved. So here you see that I have 2 stick figures. What I would like for you to do is to help me “gender” these figures in a typical if not stereotypical way. We are keeping to the binary for those advanced folks out there so you don’t need to get too creative – stick to the basics. So how this will work, is you can call out items, characteristics, etc., and I will draw it where you tell me to. I am not an artist, but I will try my best. Are we ready to start?

What would you like for me to draw or write? *[Take suggestions from the participants. Draw the best you can what they call out on the figure they tell you keeping to a binary. Have fun with this, to prompt for items. They may be getting cold, they get clothing. What is going on inside gets hormones, genitals, etc., What is the relationship between these two? Usually they are high school sweet hearts. What are their names? What pronouns do they use? What are their names? What jobs do they have? Hobbies? Habits?]* Ok, so do we feel good with this?

I like to start with these because when I start to “teach” about gender folks have a hard time understanding out automatic gendering someone is. We started with two blank stick figures. Now, these figures both had 2 legs, arms, etc. We made an assumption of able bodiedness. If you wanted them to be high school sweethearts or something like that, we

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assumed they were heterosexual. That was just an assumption we all started with. Also, take a minute to see what assumptions we made based on race, age, religion, political affiliation, native language, country of citizenship, etc. In the hundreds of times that I have done this, they never are gay, from the Masi Tribe in Kenya, older or younger than 20s or 30s, etc. The two stick figures are always upper class, white, employed or supported by the other, not criminals, no disabilities, Christian, Americans living the American dream.

Even though we didn't say it nor did I include these details in my direction it is what I get. It is what gender means to us. Gender means more than just genitalia, hormones, pronouns, sex characteristics, roles, identities, expressions, perceptions, etc. Gender is a giant amalgamation of our understood culture. We use this huge lens to see others and identify how we will interact with them. This *[pointing to figures]* becomes normal. This "normal" is socially constructed and changes over time and culture.

So this can make sense intellectually, but how does it inform our assumptions and judgments. Moreover, how does this sense of "normal" impact our behaviors?

[If this activity is paired with other activities, feel free to use figure a and figure b by the names they were assigned when talking about "normal" in other pieces of training. This prevents having to call out a participant specifically for being sexist, heterosexual, privileged, etc., just let the figure represent "normal." It is important if you do this to eventually draw a line around the participants and facilitators that we are all part of these "normal" messages.]

IT may not be our fault that we have this cultural norm informing our behaviors, thoughts, assumptions, judgments, etc., but it is our responsibility to accept this truth and do something with it. I don't think it is practical to say "I just won't do this anymore." I would prefer a degree of consistent self-reflection to better inform our reality.

When would gender not matter anymore? I like to use the example, now dated, of Britney Spears and Madonna kissing. These two women are so wealthy they can kiss and not experience homophobia or be labeled lesbian. They could also wear men's clothing and not be considered men. Is this race, class, or some other part of our culture that affords them this fluidity? *[Take a moment to discuss this concept.]*

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