

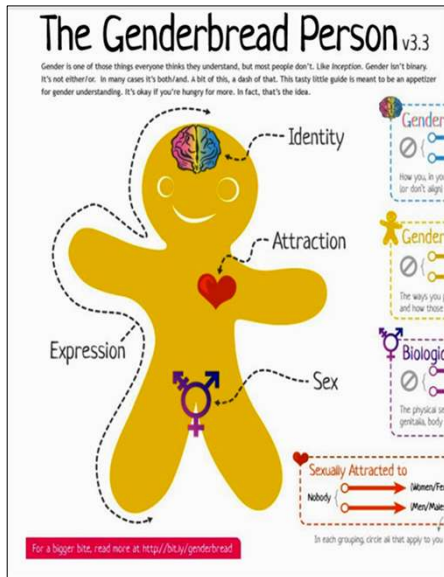
Conversations on Gender and Sexuality
Bishop's College, Kolkata

Basics of Gender and Sexuality

Pawan Dhall
Varta Trust, Kolkata
August 22, 2023

**Sex, Gender and Sexuality:
Genderbread Person**

The Person



Biological Sex: Determined based on genitals. Often also regarded as the person's gender. Better termed as sex assigned at birth.

Gender: Socially constructed understanding of how a person should or must behave, what roles they should play.

Gender Identity: Gender identity is a person's internal sense of being a man, a woman, neither of these, both, and so on. It may or may not be aligned with the sex (and gender) assigned at birth.

Gender Expression: Ways in which a person manifests masculinity, femininity, both, or neither, through appearance, behaviour, dress, speech patterns.

Sexuality (Sexual Orientation): Based on who/what kind of person one is attracted towards, sexually and/or romantically.

- (1) Sex can be understood as 'the act of having sex' as well as in terms of 'a person's genitalia'. The second meaning is often referred to as 'biological sex'.
- (2) Emphasize on the issue of 'social construction' of all aspects of gender and sexuality – how are these socially constructed? And if all these issues are social constructs, then why shouldn't all genders and sexualities be given equal space in society?
- (3) Emphasize that there is no correlation or link between the different aspects of gender and sexuality. They can be independent of each other. Example: A person's biological sex does not determine their gender identity. Or, a person's sexual orientation does not determine their gender expression. One's gender identity does not determine one's gender expression.

Binary Identity

- We are taught to see ourselves as “either/or” categories, for example, smart/not smart, good/bad, naughty/nice, male/female etc.
- Such identities are binary identities, suggesting there can't be anything other than, or in between these socially constructed categories.
- But is that entirely true? Are these not a matter of degrees?

Stepping beyond the Binaries

- What if we could plot aspects of our identities on a continuum?
- Biological sex isn't just 3 categories of male, female and intersex, but a number of variations of permutations and combinations of the sex chromosomes.
- Gender is not just man/woman, gender expression isn't just feminine or masculine, but degrees of each.
- Romantic and sexual attraction isn't only about distinctly being attracted towards one or the other sex/gender, but much more complex.

(1) Explanation for intersex: According to the United Nations for LGBT Equality, intersex persons are born with sex characteristics (including one or more of the following - genitals, gonads or internal reproductive organs, sex hormones and chromosomal patterns) that are ambiguous in terms of the typical definitions of male or female. Intersex stands for a range of sexual and reproductive anatomical possibilities and not for a fixed 'third' category of biological sex. If this difference from so-called norms is discovered at birth, intersex persons are assigned one or the other sex (and gender) by doctors based on social considerations and surgical interventions. Sometimes the difference may be discovered during adolescence or later, or may never be discovered. Intersex communities strongly argue that the 'medical normalization' or 'corrective surgeries' carried out at birth should be stopped and the person should be allowed to choose whichever gender they are comfortable with once they are legally old enough to decide.

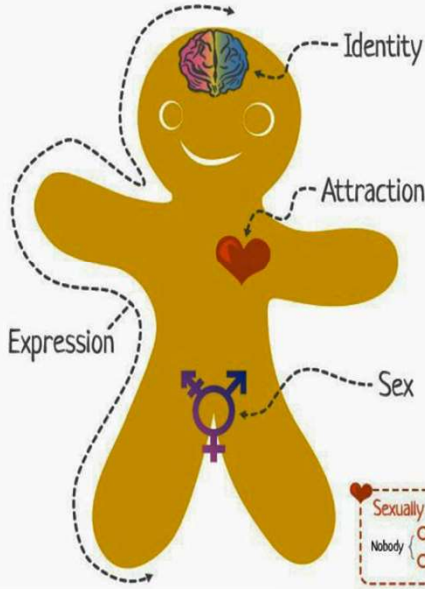
(2) Mention 'hermaphrodite' is an inaccurate and outdated term to talk about the range of possibilities that 'intersex' implies among human beings.

The Genderbread Person v3.3

by its pronounced **METROsexual**.com

Gender is one of those things everyone thinks they understand, but most people don't. Like *Inception*. Gender isn't binary. It's not either/or. In many cases it's both/and. A bit of this, a dash of that. This tasty little guide is meant to be an appetizer for gender understanding. It's okay if you're hungry for more. In fact, that's the idea.

Plot a point on both continua in each category to represent your identity; combine all ingredients to form your Genderbread. 4 (or infinite) possible plot and label combos



Gender Identity

Woman-ness

Man-ness

How you, in your head, define your gender, based on how much you align (or don't align) with what you understand to be the options for gender.

Gender Expression

Feminine

Masculine

The ways you present gender, through your actions, dress, and demeanor, and how those presentations are interpreted based on gender norms.

Biological Sex

Female-ness

Male-ness

The physical sex characteristics you're born with and develop, including genitalia, body shape, voice pitch, body hair, hormones, chromosomes, etc.

Sexually Attracted to

Nobody

(Women/Females/Femininity)

(Men/Males/Masculinity)

Romantically Attracted to

Nobody

(Women/Females/Femininity)

(Men/Males/Masculinity)

For a bigger bite, read more at <http://bit.ly/genderbread>

In each grouping, circle all that apply to you and plot a point, depicting the aspects of gender toward which you experience attraction.

by Samuel Killerman at www.ItsPronouncedMetrosexual.com

On Gender & Sexuality Diversity

- Agencies that have delisted homosexuality and trans identities as a disease/mental disorder:
 - American Psychiatric Association
 - World Health Organization
 - World Psychiatric Association
 - Indian Psychiatric Society
 - Association of Psychiatric Social Work Professionals, India
 - Indian Association of Clinical Psychologists

Gender and Sexuality Lens

- Individual expression
- Family or community environment
- Education
- Livelihood
- Health and nutrition
- Sanitation
- Media, arts and literature
- Laws and policies
- Services
- Other contexts . . . discuss . . .

(1) Discuss with examples how we can look at the different issues listed critically through the lens of gender and sexuality. This slide can be used to talk about how gender and sexuality are socially constructed.

Film screening

- Short film on gender and sexuality made by *The News Minute* in 2019:
Gender and Sexuality 101: Featuring, Rainbow the Parrot!
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMSPRLMu7UU>

Transgender umbrella

- Transgender women, Kothi, Aravani, Jogta, among several other identities
- Transgender men
- Non-binary gender or genderqueer:
 - Third gender, example Hijra communities
 - Genderfluid
 - Agender
- Not all transgender persons undergo or want to undergo gender transition or gender affirmation
- Not all transgender persons are Hijras
- Not all transgender persons are intersex
- Transgender persons can also be gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual and so on

(1) About overlap between 'transgender' and 'intersex': Being intersex and being transgender are two different issues, though they may have an overlap. Some intersex persons may grow up to identify with a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth, and they may consider themselves to be transgender. But that does not make all intersex people transgender.

Conversely, transgender people are those whose own sense of gender is not aligned with the sex (and gender) assigned to them at birth. But not all of them are born with a sexual or reproductive anatomy that is ambiguous in terms of being assigned male or female at birth.

(2) Explain 'eunuch' (a man who has been castrated) if the need arises. Emphasize that it is erroneous to conflate 'eunuch' with 'transgender' or 'Hijra'.

(3) Mention 'transsexual' as a term to talk about transgender persons who have undergone gender affirmation procedures is slowly becoming outdated.

Reading List

1. [Genderbread Person](#) website: Online source for understanding concepts of gender and sexuality
2. Editorial in the September 2017 issue of [The Odisha Journal of Psychiatry](#) by Dr. Amrit Pattojoshi, Biswa Bhusan Pattanayak and Dr. L. Ramakrishnan – *refer to section on terminology*
3. [LGBT Rights: Frequently Asked Questions](#), Free & Equal, United Nations for LGBT Equality
4. Varta Trust website – www.vartagensex.org (also <https://varta2013.blogspot.com/>)

(1) Alert: Gender and sexuality terminology keeps evolving and so there is a need to constantly update one's knowledge in this regard.

Thank you!

www.vartagensex.org

Feedback on this session can be mailed to
vartablog@gmail.com